

THE CHURCH— THE INVISIBLE

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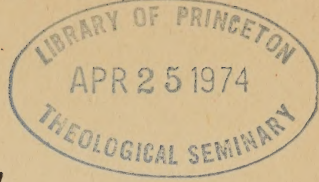
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The Church — The Invisible

BY
THE
AUTHOR
OF
THE
"SON OF MAN" and "THE REDEEMER"
[Giuseppe Petrelli]

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DEDICATION

TO THOSE WHO, HAVING GONE THROUGH A
SEQUEL OF DISAPPOINTMENTS, ARE TEMPTED
TO GIVE UP THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST—THESE
PAGES ON THE *INVISIBLE CHURCH* ARE
DEDICATED.

INVOCATION

Oh Father of graces, I confess that I tremble—lest these pages offend many and be understood by few. Grant thy special benediction on the book and its readers, in the Name of the Beloved Son, my Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

“INVISIBLE”

What meaneth this word? whence the authority to use such a title, “The Church - The Invisible”?

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. **God is Spirit:** and they that worship Him must worship **in spirit and in truth**” (John 4:21;23,24).

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

“The **Invisible** are age abiding.” (Rotherham)

“Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1, 3).

THE CHURCH—THE INVISIBLE

Introduction

The writer has been, for many years, an evangelical preacher, and has discovered that, after knowing the Person of Christ, the most important subject is the Church.

Slowly and painfully, he has come to the conclusion: that there is either the Invisible Church, or the Roman System. At first this dilemma seems sharp; but he will try, relying on the help of God, and trusting on the benevolence of the reader to give some suggestions on the point.

In dealing with a high mystery, no one should expect a mathematical explanation. The reader must have no prejudice, and must be ready to lay aside set-opinions.

The writer has been impressed by the fact that many Protestants have left their churches and have joined the Catholic Confession. But, especially, he has been desirous to read, as much as possible, the lives and writings of three men of the Anglican Church who became Catholics: Newman, Faber, and Manning. He has read almost all their books, trying to discover by what trend of reasoning, these pious and educated men arrived to their conclusion; and the impression is this:

They looked at the visible Church; and, based on history of ancient Christianity and on the theory of Adapta-

tion, they came to choose the one section of Christianity which seemed the most consistent, united, and the most capable.

If we do not recognize that the Real Church is Invisible, we do not know how to contradict those three illustrious men.

The writer will, by God's help, explain what he means by the "Invisible Church." It is an arduous theme: God will help.

I should like to quote some words which the late Cardinal Manning wrote when he was still an Anglican, as given by Purcell, one of the most voluminous biographers of the Cardinal:

"Not to go on would, to me, be to go back into pure individual religion.

"I came to see that there was no intermediate position between the Catholic faith and an undogmatic Pietism. . . . I could have rather rejected religion altogether than believe revealed Truth to be without light and certainty. I soon therefore moved in the line of definite and certain doctrine."

Later, writing to a dear friend of his, Manning said:

"If I stay [he meant in the Church of England] I shall end a simple mystic. . . . God is a spirit, and has no visible kingdom, church, or sacraments. Nothing will ever entangle me again in Protestantism, Anglican or otherwise."

Mr. Purcell quotes also a letter to the then Archdeacon Manning, in which is written: "It is the result of seven long years of perplexity, in which I can safely say that Anglicanism has never given me one thread of guidance or a little finger of support."*

These men did see the dilemma: The Church—The Invisible, or Catholicism. They had long been in what we

*Purcell, *Life of Cardinal Manning*, Volume 1.

may call "Via Media"; and they came to the conclusion—Catholicism.

Far be it from us to judge the various sections of Christianity, for all of them have excellent points, and holy individuals. God, in His Infinite Wisdom, knows how to use things and people. Those who have no better light, will be blessed wherever they are, if they are faithful to what they know. Yet, we should not close our eyes to the Truth, on the excuse that God allows exceptions.

By continuing to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, we will know the Truth; and the Truth shall make us free. Truth is costly; it leads to martyrdom. Christ was crucified by the visible religionists—let us call it church—of His day. And He is, again and again, crucified in the spirit, in those who desire to enter and live in the realm of the INVISIBLE.

PART
ONE

CHAPTER I

FIGHTING THE INVISIBLE

Man, even a saintly man, is long attached to what he sees with the naked eye. The Lord knows that; for this reason He teaches, first by visible things; and, gradually, He introduces us into the Invisible Realm. We say "Invisible,"—to the senses of the physical man.

The Israelites had seen the power and love of God in the deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and in other proofs. Moses had gone to the mountain to commune with the Lord and to receive the commandments. After some time, the people began to murmur and felt the need of something tangible. We read: "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (Exodus 32:1).

In consequence of this murmur, a golden calf was made; and they held a strange festival of mixed religion, followed by God's chastisement. We cannot fail to note the words, "Let us"; and we remember a previous "let us," from Genesis 11, when the people had gotten together and

encouraged themselves to build a tower which ended in confusion—Babel. It is the tendency of many, that, at the first difficulties, they want to arrange something. Man, getting tired of looking, in trust and faith, to his Creator and Lord, plans to fix his own religion, in some way or another.

It takes a long discipline to be anchored into the Realm of the Invisible. Without examining the vast material of the Old Testament, and noting especially in the Prophets and in the Psalms an ascending teaching towards the Invisible, we prefer to come to the New Testament, limiting ourselves there in order to prove our point: **THE REAL CHURCH OF GOD IS INVISIBLE.**

We do not mean that the Church is made of abstract theories, or of people who have no visible bodies: Christ, His Apostles, all the saints had a real body in which they were, all, visible. But what was in them was not seen, except by the Spirit of God.

The Gospel of St. Matthew (chapter 16) records Jesus' question to the disciples, as to Who He is. They reported the various opinions which were abroad: some said that He was John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Jesus was not satisfied with what *men* said, and asked again: "But whom say ye that I am?" Before going on, we should remark on the contrast between *man* and *ye*.

What say men? what say ye? Are then the "ye" not "men"? Who were they? It is interesting to note how the Great Teacher forces us to the discovery of the Truth by questions. By the demarcation between the reports of *men* and the disciples' own conclusions, He points out that there are two kinds of individuals: those who live only in the natural, visible; and those who are led by something invisible. The visible led men's opinions to a Babel; the Invisible led to one conclusion. After Peter had answered that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the

Lord replied that flesh and blood had not revealed but the Father who is in heaven.

Before proceeding, we cannot but remark, that there is a Babel of opinions concerning the person of Christ; and that, if we want to know Him, we have to depend entirely on the revelation which comes from the Invisible God.

Now, the Church is the Body of Christ, and He is the Head. The Head was known by revelation. How should the members of the Body be discovered? There is only one answer: by the same way—viz., *Revelation*. We cannot expect two methods of knowing: one for Christ, another for the Body, "for as He is, so must we be in this world" (1 John 4:17). The disciples are not above the Master. Jesus had to be unknown to man, and suffer even maledictions. Only those who accepted Him in the spirit did reverence Him. Do Christians have to pretend to be recognized and respected by everyone? or, perhaps, there is some kind of evolution, by which the Church of today has made some improvement on the Primitive Church? Has the world changed its attitude towards genuine Christianity? Many, many questions crowd our minds.

We will try, first, to consider the power of the Invisible in Christ's Life and primitive Christianity; then, we will examine if there is any kind of evolution or improvement by which we may approve the various sects of Christianity and affirm that they are the Church.

That there are everywhere individuals who belong to the Invisible Church we affirm; but that they—the various sects, Catholicism included—are the *Real Church*, we have to deny. We do this with fear and we tremble, for, individually, we are no better than others; but we desire to present the TRUTH as it has been manifested in the Unique Life of the Son of God and of His primitive disciples.

CHAPTER II

SON OF A VIRGIN

The writer would have, long ago, abandoned any activity as a Christian worker if the Lord had not, in His mercy, given to him glimpses of the Invisible Church and Realm. In the visible, the Church is a failure and offers the sad spectacle of confusion and discord. Enthusiasm or ecclesiastical policy will keep many in the ranks of workers, but genuine Christians—and thank God there are—will not be satisfied with the compromising spirit which has dominated and dominates visible Christendom. But, when we meditate on the Life and Person of Christ, on His seeming defeat in the visible, and on the assurance He gave of a Kingdom, we have to conclude that the Church—the real Body of the Lamb—is not what we see, but is Invisible to natural man, and she moves full of trust in the Invisible Realm.

Christ came into the world in a mysterious way. Long before His nativity, a prophet of Israel had announced that He should be the Son of a Virgin. This mystery could not be explained by any human demonstration. To that good man, Joseph, it was revealed by God Himself through an angel in a dream. There were many religious people in Israel. We beg to be excused if we do use the word “re-

ligious," not in its strict etymological sense, but in its colloquial sense; for, in its etymological sense, it is a deep word, conveying the idea of a double binding with the Almighty; but in the common sense, it means any church-going or any kind of ecclesiasticism. In this last sense, we say, there were many religious people in Israel. The mystery of the incarnation was not revealed to them, but only to Joseph and, later on, to a few other pious people. Far from us to sit in judgment on those who had not the revelation; however, we feel confident to affirm that the few ones who were privileged with the revelation are the Invisible Church. The stream which remains pure and clear in the ocean of conflicts, scandals, disorders: such a pure stream God has always had and will have till the consummation of the ages. It is in God's method of work to act either through one individual or through a few. He called one man from the Chaldean idolatry, in order to create a multitude through him. He sent only His begotten Son in order that through Him a multitude would be created.

After Abraham, various individuals, in different times, were used to reach others. On the footsteps of God's dear Son, "sons" are created that they, in turn, may reach crowds. These, who are destined to become like the Elder Brother, are the *Church*, we say the Invisible Church. They, too, these unknown ones are sons of the Virgin. Let us explain: they are people born again, which is born from Above. No human eye can witness this new birth, consequently they are invisibly born. Just as the Christ was revealed, so these—born again people—must be revealed. When Mary visited Elizabeth, nothing in the human realm announced the mystery of the Incarnation. Elizabeth was informed through a divine act. She, too, was carrying in her bosom a child of destiny. When the two saintly women approached each other, there was an individual intercourse between the two invisible children. The future servant—

John the Baptist—felt the presence of the Child—Lord—and exulted. This is God's method, that people who belong to the Invisible Church shall recognize each other when their visible bodies approach each other. It happened to more than one servant of Christ, that, in a crowd, he was attracted to one individual, and had to approach and speak to him. He had to talk to someone who had been secretly prepared by God's providence to receive the message of the Kingdom.

There are some affirmations which seem arbitrary, if not entirely unreasonable and absurd. Jesus said that He was sent only for the lost sheep of Israel. John, commenting on the prophecy of Caiaphas, added that Jesus had to die not only for that nation but that "He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." These two affirmations call for a serene meditation. Was Jesus interested only in the visible Israel? was He indifferent to all mankind? Who are these scattered children? Weighty questions are these, which we do not pretend to answer in an exhausted way, but which we will try, with reverence, to understand, and pass on to the readers what the Lord will graciously condescend for us to write.

And of this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

LOST SHEEP—SCATTERED CHILDREN

Whoever reads according to the letter, the incident of the Syrophenician woman of which is recorded in Matthew 15:22-28 is struck by the affirmation of Jesus that He was sent only for the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Of course, the common interpretation of the incident is, that Jesus delayed His work of mercy in order to test the faith of a desolate mother. This test is included in the lesson, but does not explain, in the natural, the words, "lost sheep of the House of Israel." By a one-sided interpretation we should conclude that Jesus determined at first to work only for the lost sheep; and then allowed Himself to be persuaded to make an exception for the stranger's petition. This supposition cannot stand in the face of the fact that Jesus never affirmed anything except the truth; and that His affirmations never changed under the force of human persuasions. No changing moods in the Son of God, in whom each word was *Yes* and *Amen*.

We have to affirm that that woman was one of the lost sheep of Israel. There is Israel according to the flesh, and in this sense, she was not; there is Israel according to the spirit, and, in this sense, she was. For, there are children of

Abram—the ones according to the flesh; and the children of Abraham—the ones according to the spirit, who are in the line of the faith of the patriarch. This woman kept crying after Jesus, and stood the test of a seeming indifference, even to the point of humbling herself to accept the comparison to a dog, and was satisfied with the crumbs, falling from the tables of children. She was ignorant, in the mind, of her real connection with the Deity; but had an inner intuition, a spirit-knowledge, that she could not be refused in her request. The woman did three things: she began to cry after Jesus; she worshipped, prostrating herself at His feet; she accepted the test of a severe humiliation. The dog is an impure animal. The fanatical Jews used to call "dogs" the outsiders. But these three are, exactly, the tests of every child of the Kingdom. A long deep cry of the spirit, a spirit of adoration, and taking a place even of a dog. David called himself a dead dog.

Of this double knowledge—in the mind and in the spirit—we have to speak in a separate chapter, for it is our duty to answer, as far as possible, honest objections. Nevertheless, we have to say a word on another objection which comes from reading John 11:52, that Jesus will gather in one the scattered children of God. The question will be: what about the rest of mankind? Of these two questions, we will treat in the following chapter. Meanwhile, let us consider John 11:52.

Scattered children.

Many people are ignorant of their high destiny and need the touch of a master, to be revealed to themselves. We have read of great generous men in various departments of life who, in meeting some little child, discovered in him a great artist or a great writer. The poor boy was just tending some mean occupation, when some gentle soul discovered a greatness in him. History is full of such examples.

The same happens in the spiritual realm. There are in various countries, in all the degrees of life, people who, deep in their spirit, are strangers to their surroundings. They carry in their bosom a secret dissatisfaction. Although they, some of them at least, have every comfort, they feel like exiled princes in a foreign country. If our eye were exercised in divining from the face the inner history of individuals, we would in many lives read—*Exile*.

Imagine that the children and grandchildren of a king have been dispersed in various localities, and obliged to various modes of living. Some of them slaves, some in high estates, etc. That king desires to gather them. He would train some special servants to go around throughout the world and discover these scattered princes, inform them of their origin and destiny, and exhort them to go to the paternal home. These servants are in the scriptures called angels. Jesus said that angels will be dispatched to the four corners of the earth to gather His Elect. The Psalmist (Psalm 50) informs that the Lord will call to the heavens above and to the earth below, that He may judge His people. He will say: "Gather my saints together unto me."

The earth has not four corners, in a material sense. Geographical indications suggest that the gathering will be even from the most extreme conditions. These servants, angels, who have to attend to the gathering, are not proselytizers, trying to build large assemblies through human energy and means. It is not our desire to despise the various efforts made by churches to reach crowds. This, too, may have its benefits under the wise and overruling Providence of God. Our subject is the "Scattered Children"; and we consider this point: the special servants dispatched to gather them, even from extreme, desperate conditions.

Not every individual is capable in human affairs to become a detective, a special secret service man. There

are people with special talents, keen observations: such ones are trained for delicate missions. There are heads of factories, of various departments of work, who understand at a glance a good worker, or one who may become such. Humanity has such ones: God has them too. There are some rare souls, possessed of deep tenderness and keen intuition whom the Lord calls and trains in His school to become His secret ambassadors, servants, angels to search and bring back the scattered princes in exile. Such servants may seem indifferent to crowds of people; and will remain silent before many; but will feel, at once, as it were an electric shock, at the appearance of a strange face in a strange land; and, as if attracted by a magnet, they will approach an individual whom they meet for the first time and in confidence say to him: "Sir, I have to speak to you." We know of such incidents, and we remember faces responding almost with tears at the first approach of such a servant. On this principle is built the Real Missionary work. But such servants are destined to be martyrs, for the visible church does not understand them, nor their methods; and, consequently, ridicules or persecutes them. We remember the words of the Lord, that the prophet is killed in the earthly Jerusalem. But, it is time to answer the questions: the double knowledge, and what of those who are not the scattered children—of which in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

DOUBLE KNOWLEDGE

FIRST BORN and MANKIND

Two scriptural passages will help us to answer the first part of this chapter. Psalm 51:6 reads: "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden thou shalt make me to know wisdom." There is, then, a truth and wisdom implanted and known in the inner man.

In the last discourse to the Eleven, Jesus said among other things: "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas answered: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life."

It is fair and logical to ask ourselves: whose affirmation was right?—the one Jesus stated that they knew; or that of Thomas remarking that they knew not. It is not just to doubt the honesty of the disciple. Jesus did not reprimand him, as if he were affirming something against his own consciousness. However, it would be a blasphemy to doubt the truth of Jesus' statement that they knew.

The explanation is not given in the letter, for Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach. It is, then, by

the Spirit—the Invisible Teacher—that we are enabled to harmonize the seeming contradictory statements. Jesus spoke prophetically and meant to say that implanted in the hearts of the disciples was the inner knowledge. Thomas, not expert in the realm of the invisible, referred to mental knowledge. Hence, both affirmations were right. Whosoever accepts Jesus has in him the seed of truth and wisdom, for He is the Wisdom of God and the Truth personified. The mind remains blank for a long time; but, little by little, it becomes illuminated: the inner truth will become, at least in part, mental truth. That there is such a dualism between inner and intellectual knowledge is also clear from Romans 8:26, where the Apostle observes that many times prayers are offered without the understanding of the mind. "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The mind is inactive; but the human spirit, at the touch of the divine Spirit, begins to groan, which is, begins to pray. This dualism of knowledge is also inferred that the information of our being children of God is not given to the mind first, but to the inner man. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Enough on the first question. To the second.

God loves all mankind: they are His creatures. As we grow in the knowledge of Him, we begin to reverence Him more and more, also as Creator; and we grow in the love of His creation. Consider the words "Creator," "creation," and "creature" especially in the last book. Real saints love even the stones of the street. The Psalmist understood and saw the feastings even of the trees of the fields—yes, even of material trees. The seraphim proclaimed, in the hearing of Isaiah, that all the earth is full of God's glory. The Creator loves His creation. No man can respect another and despise the work of the hands of that person.

Since God has a scope even in the creation of an insect or a worm, how much more has He in man who is at the head of earthly creatures! Then, we should say, and someone has said: "Man, oh sacred object of my heart!" We recollect that one of the most saintly men has called "brother" and "sister" even inanimate objects—yes, even a wolf. If we understand this, we will realize that our privilege of being children of God—those scattered princes, first born, Invisible Church—puts us under a severe obligation towards all God's creation.

In the message of the Lord to Pharaoh, Israel was called God's first born. Now, the first born in the family should not become the tyrant over the other children; he is called to help his parents by being a kind of second mother, father, to the rest of the family. If Israel had understood that privileges are severe duties, she would not have suffered as much as she did. Israel was called to be a blessing to the rest of the world, and not to despise anyone. Be it as it may, there is no failure in God: there was, there is a remnant.

This is the destiny of the Church. God works through the mediator—Jesus—and through those who, like a prolongation of His Son, become mediators. There is a kind of mourning in the creation. The winds, the waves, the motion of the leaves—all have a note in a minor key. The earth wears a tearful aspect of a lost grandeur; desolation appears everywhere: even the mute animals have a look of anguish. This the Apostle expresses in the words: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestations of the sons of God."

Some day, then, when the Lord will have accomplished His plan *in* and *for* the Church, marvels will appear in the restored creation. Meanwhile, wherever an exile prince is discovered and brought into the realization of his destiny, there is a kind of refreshing around him. Wherever he

moves, he leaves a certain aroma of peace. Simple people do not understand, but feel well near a real saint. It is an anticipation and a prophecy of what will be when the real Body, the Body of Christ — the Church — will have reached the destiny and maturity to which the Lord has called her.

CHAPTER V

FIRST WORSHIPPERS AND DISCIPLES

The same rule applies to the Head and to the Body, for as Christ has been in this world, so His Body must be. Those who saw Jesus saw God through Him. Those who see the Church see Christ through her.

The first visitors saw Him as a little Baby: various classes are represented. The first were the shepherds, working men, watchers in the night; they received the announcement from on high and were directed to the place where the Babe was. They were given a sign: "And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes." This is one of the main lessons for God's people; that whereas the world and worldly religion looks on the outside and is attracted by the spectacular, God moves often incognito and in small, even insignificant beginnings. To the shepherds the sign was not the messenger nor the glory which shone around them, but the little Infant in the manger. It requires love to God and faith in Him to forego the imposing visible and see the glory of the Invisible in small obscure things. Alas! nominal Christianity has gone and is going, even too much, after visible splendors.

The next visitors to the Baby Jesus were two old people; one was Simeon who was waiting to see the consolation of Israel, on a inner assurance (revelation). When the time came, the aged saintly man was moved, not by anything visible, but by the invisible inner workings of the Spirit, to go to the temple. Without asking questions of anyone, he went to the gentle mother and took the Child from her arms. He blessed God and prophesied. Poor were Joseph and Mary, having not even the means of purchasing a lamb for the sacrifice. No signs were on the Child or on His Mother. All movements were led by the Spirit which is invisible.

No one was dispatched to give the announcement to another noble soul, the prophetess Anna, an aged widow, a faithful woman of prayer: she arrived at the same time in the temple and joined in the praises. Anna spoke, then and later, of that Babe to those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel in Jerusalem. Spoke not to all, as proselyting religion would exhort to do, but only to those whom she, by inner admonition, knew were also waiting. No use to evangelize those who have not been prepared by God's providence to listen.

We detect, at this point, the noise of proselyters, quoting the text: "Go ye in all the world . . . to every creature." This text is a command to the whole Body, and covers, in time, all the present dispensation. It means that some in one direction, some in another; some reaching in one class, some another, the Body will give the testimony wherever the Spirit leads. But to proceed:

The last visitors were the wise men of the East, led by a star: they made—as most of us have made—the mistake of leaving the heavenly direction, taking, instead, ecclesiastical authority for guidance. We know what happened: Jerusalem and the usurper king were troubled. The wise men recuperated their joy, when they, out of Jeru-

saalem, saw the star again. They reached their destiny and worshipped the Child-King. They were warned not to return to their country through the same route. Enough with the earthly Jerusalem. Yet, their mistake did cost the lives of many innocent children, and the anguish of many mothers. True, God knows how to compensate things and turn into blessings the greatest sorrows; but the fact remains, that those who have the spiritual leading and take, instead, man's advice, do cause disaster to others.

There is in the life of Jesus, except for the incident of His remaining at the temple at the age of twelve, a long silence. That time has been called the "silent years." Yet, they were not silent, for they prepared heaven's verdict on Him when He was baptized in the river Jordan. God the Father spoke, voicing approval and satisfaction in Him; and the Holy Spirit, invisible to human eyes, came in a visible form as a dove and alighted on Jesus. Only one man, besides Jesus, saw and heard; and it was John the Baptist. In speaking to the Jews later on, he testified that he knew not who Jesus was; but that he was ascertained from heaven, by what he heard and saw.

A pause at this point: The mother of John the Baptist, Elizabeth, had known of the Baby Jesus. There was a family relation between them. It is not impossible that they may even have met before the baptism, or, at least, John had heard of the presence of his kin in the family of Joseph. He must have known the visible Jesus, but he was ignorant of the *invisible in* Jesus: this was revealed to him at the baptism.

There is a time when we see only the Man—Jesus; the day will dawn when he will see God in that Man. The Apostle Paul writes: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh [visible]: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Corinthians 5:16). Among the various meanings

of this rich verse, is this rendering: there is a time when we know only the material events, as recorded in the Gospel, but the day comes when we will see, in those simple narratives mysteries and prophetic teachings, of what must come to pass in the Church, in which the life of Christ must be reincarnated and lived again. It is worthy of study: Jesus' method of selecting the disciples; how He dealt with the crowds; and the performing of His miracles. These three lines are worth considering. Of this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

THE DISCIPLES—THE CROWD—THE MIRACLES

Impossible to locate the wind; no one can photograph it: only its effects are noticeable. Impossible to make a system, a human logical arrangement of Jesus' procedures: they belong to another realm. Until our minds are turned to the heavenly realities, God's ways are foolishness unto man.

No one selected for such a great mission, so poor, inadequate agents. Moreover, the disciples came from the most unexpected places. One alone among them was a Jew, and he turned a betrayer; the others belonged to an obscure province of Palestine. Galilee was despised by the Gentiles because it was part of Palestine; and was despised by the Jews because it was situated at the border limit of the Gentiles. In that territory, between two worlds, both hostile, Jesus selected His companions and performed most of His miracles.

There are many books on Jesus' method in training the Twelve. But we have to limit ourselves to one topic: the invisible realm. Jesus' aim was to constantly point the invisible realm. Prayer, fastings, alms, justice—all to be done and sought in the presence of the One who is Invisible. The disciples had to learn to be unknown, that only God

might be seen in them and through them. In everything they had to depend on the unseen direction of the One who, though invisible, works visible results. They had to learn that reality is not what man sees, but what God sees. They had to learn also that Truth came only by Jesus. In the mystical language "truth" means, that which has permanency and substance. He taught them by word and by example. Impossible to detail. In proportion that we, too, follow that master, we understand Jesus' methods with the Twelve. He did not burden them with a quantity of maxims or theoretical teachings. He taught them to ask upon each day the bread for that day, and it means more than material food. He told them that He had many things to say, but that they were not as yet mature to bear them. Most of His time He devoted to the Twelve. Comparatively, He was not much with the crowds, but He loved them too.

Jesus never courted popularity. When He had large followings, He changed place and went to other people. He knew that people are not won in crowds, mass conversions; but, one by one, and through various ministries. For this reason, little by little, He was abandoned by the multitudes and remained with few people, until He was abandoned by almost all. It is a prophecy of what shall happen to the members of the Invisible Church: they will not be popular. Disappointed crowds will forsake them; and they will remain with a few. Yet, there will be a new beginning. Christ after death began to have crowds. Each member of the Invisible Church after he has lost and begun a solitary walk of martyrdom, he, too, will have crowds. This is one of the lessons we will, by God's help, study in the Song of Solomon. But, let us not anticipate.

Miracles. No two miracles are identical. No one could foresee His methods of working in each case. Some suggested that He should lay hands. Jesus without correcting

the presumptuous advice silently went His way and worked His own methods. What a study it would be to consider each miracle and discover the hidden lesson for the Church, for His acts must have a replica, at least, in a spiritual sense, in His body. What He did, the Church must do also; and even more: this is the promise, for Jesus has gone to the Father.

Jesus aimed always at the invisible. In the case of the palsied man, He began by forgiving sins. The sick one knew, but the spectators knew not. For them, something visible was needed. Visible things, signs are for unconverted people, not for the Invisible Church. For Her to ask visible things before obeying and moving would be a distrust. There will be tangible results, which are the fruits of obeying the Invisible Commander.

When the disciples were calling attention to the massive and beautiful temple, Jesus answered, (Matthew 24:2): "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." As if to say: "Are you still looking at the visible, and are dazzled by it? The visible shall perish; the invisible only shall remain."

At this point, I remember what I had read somewhere of a certain individual who sneered at the words of a deep Christian and said to him, something like this: "I do not go after your dream, for I am a practical man, and I believe only in visible things." To which the Christian replied: "Call your things a dream and what I say to you, Reality."

A word on the Temple.

We glance backward to the Jews who were exiled after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. A great disaster to those benighted souls, yet a lesson to look higher and deeper. They were without the magnificent temple, because God meant for them something better and permanent. We read in Ezekiel 11:16: "Thus saith the Lord God;

Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

Prophecy is this of the Invisible Church, often without any place which they may call their home. But they, themselves, shall become a temple for the living God to dwell therein, and God Himself shall be their House and Sanctuary.

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE DISCIPLES

It is in God's plan to work, either by an individual or by a small number, in order to reach infinite results.

We read that Jesus took three of His disciples to be near Him in special occasions: the raising of Jarius' daughter; the transfiguration; and Gethsemane. It does not mean that the other disciples should remain strangers to the said experiences. Except Judas, all the Eleven and many others are part of the Invisible Church. But the lesson conveyed in selecting *three* and leaving the others strangers for a time to the three experiences, is that the others should know through them (the three) of the three events. In fact, the Gospel narratives clearly infer that the three gave the testimony to the others, concerning the events which had occurred.

There is a blessing in appropriating spiritual lessons without seeing, in a material sense, the person who was in the event. Consequently, we should not consider the three disciples superior to the others because they had the privilege of being with Jesus in person in the three cases. The others, by accepting the testimony, were by the Spirit led to the reality of the same experience. Rather, we should say that the three disciples did not, at first, realize the im-

portance of their being led—only they—with Jesus in the three places; but that the Holy Spirit did make the experience a living one, after Jesus had ascended to the Father. We must, more and more, delve into the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:16-17. Some one has translated: "If we have even been gaining after the flesh a knowledge of Christ, on the contrary, now are we no longer gaining it." None of us have seen Christ in the flesh, yet we have no lesser privileges of the people of those days, because the Holy Spirit gives to us the living representation of things. Of course, the Invisible Church lives Christ's realities by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Three lessons in the three occasions.

Seven people were in the maiden's room: the Author of Life, the three disciples, the parents of the damsel, and the damsel herself. "Seven" is a number of perfection. Only One acted; and only one was the direct recipient of the Lord's power. But all the seven had the same benefit. The Lord did not lay His hand on the damsel, but took her by the hand. Some translate, "grasped the hand of the child." Power in that hand. He spoke few mysterious words which are given to us as translated, which means interpreted. There is no need to inform us—readers of the English Bible—that the words are translated, for the entire message of the New Testament was not written in English but in another language. The information "translated," "interpreted," teaches us that every word needs the interpretation of the Spirit, otherwise words are mere letter. We have to learn *what* is written and *how* to read it, (Luke 10:26). The child, on opening her eyes, her hand secured in Jesus' hand, looked upon the face of the Son of God. She, later, began to walk; and the scripture informs that she was twelve years of age. To the risk of repeating what we have mentioned in one of our previous books, we note that even, if she had been younger than twelve years, she

could have walked just the same. The "twelve years" and the "walking" are mentioned for a higher reason, pointing to a new beginning: walk after resurrection. The number "twelve" also means apostolic teaching and refers to the doors of the New Jerusalem. A new walk after such a number.

There was no explosion of enthusiasm but a calm command to give her food. The order, not to publish what had happened, was impossible to be obeyed in that place, because the funeral had already begun. It is a prophetic teaching to the Invisible Church, to measure her words, according to people and circumstances. The three disciples were mute spectators and absorbed the scene. The Holy Spirit represented to them the detailed events and began to interpret and is still interpreting. The teaching, as an enlarging circle, reaches from one group to another.

Transfiguration. Another grand lesson, that, before entering any ministry of suffering in the valley, we need a fresh touch of the transfiguration, which speaks of God's Kingdom. Apart, on a lofty and high mountain, they saw Jesus at prayer and noticed the hidden majesty of Him becoming visible. Then appeared two men, who are the representatives of the old dispensations, and conversed with Jesus. The lawgiver and the prophet of fire are seen for a time. Peter, suggesting the three tabernacles, is interpreting the desire of the other two companions, James and John. They were yet ignorant of God's plan. A cloud, which is a type of many clouds that come into our lives, covered the two messengers of the old dispensation. They disappeared from the sight of the disciples. Jesus alone remained. The voice from above thundered the message, "This is my Son, the Beloved, be hearkening unto Him" (Rotherham's translation). There is in every Christian, for a time, a mixture of Moses and Elijah. They have their part in the teaching to the Church, but only a preliminary

part. The time must come for each member of the Invisible Church to see and hear Jesus only.

After the transfiguration, being charged to narrate to no one—meaning, not to any man of earth—what they had seen, they had to descend to the plain to witness the sad spectacle of an epileptic boy, and the condition of the other disciples who had been entrapped in a discussion with the scribes. Too long, if not altogether impossible, to meditate on each incident.

Gethsemane. The same three disciples are now in a capacity to enter Gethsemane, the place of the olive-press. Of course, they failed; but the lesson remains. Only after we have known the power of Jesus' Resurrection are we enabled to enter in the fellowship of His sufferings and His death, (Philippians 3:10).

Eleven disciples reached the entrance of Gethsemane; three went in, being asked of Jesus to tarry with Him. His humanity, our humanity, needs the touch of a friend. But they slept, and Jesus was left alone in that struggle called *Agony*. An insight of the great heart of the Redeemer and, prophetically, of the heart of the Church; and also the sad disappointment, that in the hardest conflicts of life, those, too, who belong to the Invisible Church, are left alone in order to learn that real comfort comes only from God. Yet, the failure of the three disciples who slept instead of watching is a lesson to the Church. They themselves related the sufferings of their Master and their failure. The relating itself has more power in helping us who also are human than if they had not failed at all.

Jesus exhorted them that they could rest and in the same time ordered them to get up for the betrayal was at hand. A double lesson: the past is past, confess it and do not worry over it; harness yourself and prepare for the next duty. It seems we hear at this point the exhortation in Philippians 3:13-14. "Forgetting those things which are

behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the . . . high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Rest and action in the Invisible Church.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TWO AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

In that book, which we may call a *Vade Mecum* of the Christian Church, the Song of Solomon, the bride promised herself: "Until the day break and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense." The Church must live between these two heights: Calvary and the upper room of glory. Books have been written on both these places, and never can enough be said. But we are concerned with the preparations for the Church, that she may give her message to the world.

To John we owe the record of Mary at the foot of the Cross. He, too, John, was there in those awful hours of Jesus' agony. The others were away, or at some distance. We read: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, Behold thy son. Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

A mother and a son are often mentioned in the scriptures. There are instances in the Old Testament of dead youths restored to their mothers, alive. In the New Testament we have the case of the widow of Nain and her son, and how Jesus gave the boy back to the mother. The two—

mother and son—need each other. In the case of Jarius, the emphasis is given, rather, to the father and to the daughter. Glancing back to the book of Genesis, we observe that the soul of Jacob was united to the boy Benjamin. However, there is not a pair that can be compared to the two individuals who form the subject of this chapter, Mary and John.

The first difference is that according to blood relation, they were not "mother and son." By this we are reminded that there are relations which, though bearing the same human names, are not based on human will or blood: it is the family of the Spirit. These two—Mary and John—are types of the Church, complementing each other. One of them is not sufficient. Both portray, when they are considered as an entity, the Body of Christ. Both had undergone a preparation before they were given one to another as "mother and son." Little we know of their previous lives, but that little, illumined by the Holy Spirit, projects a great light.

Mary is one of the rarest women of humanity. The way she accepted the message of the angel, her prudence, the habit of meditating and comparing things within herself, her silence—all is worth considering. But the greatest hour of her life was at the foot of the cross. There, the prophecy of old Simeon had its main fulfillment: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Someone translates the second part of the prophecy: "That reasonings may be revealed out of many hearts." It is a mistake to apply the revelation of thoughts or reasonings only to Mary, for the word does not limit the revelation to her alone. The piercing of the sword would be hers, but the benefit would be to many people.

To study Mary, the Church gains in the spirit of revelation. We forego the scanty notices in the Gospel narrative

about her, and we look to her at the foot of the Cross. She was standing there, which means a determination, wrapped in herself—the picture of dignified sorrow, seeing her son, a mark of suffering and mocking. It is true that Mary did not really understand the message on the Resurrection, but her remaining silent and firm at the foot of the Cross was like preaching to Jesus, that she was proud to be His mother. Much can be said, much was said by that patient and suffering face.

Jesus saw the mother; and the word means much more than a mere seeing. She had been, according to the flesh, His mother. Her mission she had fulfilled. Now she is entrusted with another mission, to become again a mother. Let us not minimize the great mysteries of God by limiting them to material proportions. It is true that the elderly woman needed some human comfort and help; but *that* motherhood goes beyond any material interest. The Lord began by appealing to her and continued by appealing to John.

John, the beloved: we have met him before. The appellation, "Son of Thunder," is the greatest inkling of a fiery and deep character. We have seen the same disciple leaning on Jesus' breast during the Last Supper. Now we find him stationed at the foot of the Cross. His attitude is not of one who is here to represent himself; rather, he seems, moved by consideration, to be like a support to that woman, who was slowly devouring the great tragedy. The disciple was standing by Mary. He was not trying to attract attention to himself, that he had devotion to a dying Lord, but all his bearing seemed to show that Mary needed a real friend now. Jesus saw all that and much more, and spoke to the mother: "'Woman, Behold thy son.' He is really a son, a unique son. This hour has given the full revelation of his reliability. You need him."

Then, turning His eyes and directing Himself to John, He said: "Behold thy mother!" It meant to say—and much more: "You are dependable. I know you, but you lack one thing and your lacking point must be filled by someone who must mother you. There are many individuals who are supposed to be like mothers and fathers, but you need to adopt her as a *mother*, your real spiritual mother. You have an earthly mother, I know it; but for the future plan of your life, you need a special mother." Much can be said about John's temperament, to be under a certain control by someone who was the incarnation of gentle patience and steady meditation. John must have answered with an ascending look to His dying Lord. No words, but all his face beamed a "Yes," which was *yes*, indeed. In fact we read: "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." The word "home" is in italics: it means, that Mary immediately was accepted by John as a vital part of his life.

A new picture. It is in the upper room, where the one hundred and twenty were waiting for the Promise of the Father. We read: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren" (Acts 1:14). Was it necessary to make a special reference to the mother of Jesus, since women had been mentioned? It seems superfluous, but is not. Mary had been at the Cross; now she is in the upper room from where the glorious message has to go forth. It is true that the New Testament record is silent about her after that occasion: her lot was not to speak, but to influence a great ministry—John's ministry. It is impossible to imagine John remaining independent of that woman whom the dying Lord had consigned to him as mother. Impossible also to imagine Mary, a spiritual adopted mother, indifferent to John's life and service. We do not need informations in the letter. The words from

the Cross are sufficient. From that place every word which was uttered was and is of value, extending *ad infinitum*.

It is in the plan of God that the Invisible Church must penetrate and understand things which are not written and not visible to common eyes. The Holy Spirit illumines what is written and what was not written which passed through the great lips, or merely through the great heart of the Saviour. Jesus did not say all things: He had many things to say, but the disciples could not bear them then. Revelation and teaching will be progressive. "The Spirit shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of me, and shall shew it unto you."

Many things Jesus began to say and then stopped. But all was registered by the Holy Spirit for the time when He—Holy Spirit—would manifest, reveal, (for this is the real meaning of the word "glorify"), Jesus.

This, then, is the lesson to the Invisible Church, and through her, through others, that to be a real Christian one must unite in himself the fiery determination of the Son of Thunder, and the quiet submission and deep meditation of the mother of Jesus:

Thy son—Thy mother.

CHAPTER IX

THE THREE AT THE TOMB

St. John wrote of the three at Jesus' sepulchre. The same observation written in the previous chapter applies also in this, that the lesson does not remain with the three, but extends itself from group to group. We see, not three individuals, but the whole Body of Christ visiting the tomb and looking for the Body of that One Person. The first to visit the sepulchre had been a woman who stands unique in the Gospel narrative. It is Mary Magdalene who had been released from seven demons. Type is she of each individual belonging to the Church who has been freed from the power of satan and has the heart consumed by love and gratitude. It is always such characters that are the first to run and visit Jesus' tomb.

The Magdalene found the sepulchre, but the Body was missing. She felt the need of telling others, and selected Simon Peter and John. She herself returned to the sepulchre. Peter and John hastened. John, outrunning Peter, arrived first. Peter ran also and arrived next. John, the man of contemplation, saw more than Peter. Peter, the man of action, acted more than John. Peter entered the tomb. No one can measure the volume of sorrow in that big heart when he jumped into the sepulchre, as to ascer-

tain himself of what there was no need of more certainty, that the Body was not there. Peter wanted even to touch the cold stone which had been the last to touch the remains of the Beloved Lord. John looked and saw the napkin which had been upon Jesus' head, not lying with the linen bandages, but folded apart in one place. He, too, entered the sepulchre. John saw—his intense seeing—and believed.

Believed what? Clearly that Jesus had risen, for only that hand would leave things in order, whereas a thief would have stolen also the linen, or in running away would have left everything in disorder. Yet, by one of those affirmations, seemingly contradictory, after the information that he believed, the scripture adds: "For not yet knew they the scripture, that He must needs from among the dead arise," (John 20:9, Rotherham's translation). Strange contradiction in a not yet mature Christian: believed and yet did not believe. The scripture continues: "The disciples therefore departed again by themselves" (Rotherham's translation). (This "themselves" is more according to the original text.) The funeral was entirely over. The Body had not been found. Notwithstanding the indication of the folded napkin and linen, it was no use to remain by that empty tomb. According to what happens to everyone, after a great tragedy which cannot be remedied, the two disciples departed, as to abandon forever that place of sorrow; and sank, each one, in himself. Beautiful type are they of the Church, but only in part, for there was still something to do near that tomb, which seemed a place of despair, but turned to be the platform from which the first grand message of the Resurrection was proclaimed to humanity.

Another person did not go, but remained. It was not *Contemplation* nor *Action*, but broken-hearted love which never gives up when there may even be the least vestige of hope. The Magdalene remained standing without, against the tomb weeping. "As she wept, she stooped down, and

looked into the sepulchre. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the Body of Jesus had lain." Each word carries a weighty significance, as if this poor individual would have a fight with the sepulchre; and her weapons were a flood of tears. It is the power of deep sorrow. And she won, for on that sepulchre itself, which had been mute and dead, vestiges of the beyond began to appear—two radiant angels. She saw them and did not speak, nor was transported to ecstasies at their radiant appearance. Type is she of those Christians who, really immersed in Christ, look for Him and have not their head turned by anything grand and clamorous which is not Christ. Alas! we cannot help thinking of so many in the churches who easily become elated at anything spectacular or impressive. Angels are beautiful creatures, but they are not Christ. The Magdalene kept weeping.

The angels asked her: "Woman, why weepest thou?" *Why?* There is a motive back of every act, for there are many kinds of weeping. She answered: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." She did not ask anything from the angels; she knew they could not have stolen the dead Body. Though her words did not have for her all the meaning which the Holy Spirit is putting on them, it seems to us that to the angelic beings she lamented the disappearance of Jesus, calling Him not by the earthly name, but by the word which denotes power and authority—Lord. We cannot refrain from some consideration concerning the churches: there is many times a grand apparatus, splendor, and music—but where is the Lord? We mean the only One who is Lord, for many lords have usurped His place. Sad reflection of the scriptures, that many superficial Christians rejoice in things which, to them, seem of paramount importance, but are nothing in God's plan (Amos 6:13). And also the same

superficial Christians despise things which, to them, seem unimportant, but which have importance in God's sight (Zechariah 4:10). But to return:

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." The Magdalene remained weeping. She had no desire to keep her face directed to the angels. She turned away from their splendor, as she would keep devouring her heart in darkness and solitude. But just then her intense love brought a full reward, "She saw Jesus standing." But she knew not that it was He. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" *Why—Whom?* Double interrogation. The Magdalene did not answer the questions but hastened to her point. "Supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Jesus appeared, not in a radiant form, but in the mean apparel of a common laborer. Indeed, He travels incognito; and it is given only to those, like the Magdalene, to discover Him. The woman did not speak to the gardener about the Lord but asked him directly, if he knew where the Body was, for he, being a worker in that place, was in the capacity to know. Perhaps he himself had taken away the Body to a different place. She asked no favor, no help to put the Body back in the tomb, but only the indication, at least the indication, and she would take care of the rest.

Let us not pass in a hurry or lightly upon these events. That Body is a prophecy of another body which must be discovered and put in its place. The Lord and His Body need each other. We must know where is Christ and where His Church is also. At this devotion and readiness to any kind of sacrifice, Jesus answered, not with messages, but with a *name*. He saith unto her, "*Mary*." Nothing else did He say, and there was no need to say anything more. Her name being pronounced by those lips, she needed no other

proof to discover that the insignificant appearance of the gardener was none other than her Lord and Saviour. The Magdalene knew the *voice*, and it is only by knowing the voice that the sheep discover the shepherd.

"She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." To the one word, she answered also with one word: it is the new realm in which words become, more and more, rare; but where acts and love speak without utterance. The Magdalene prostrated herself at Jesus' feet. But He saith unto her: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father; and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

In the risen life, the Church has to learn the power of the invisible above anything which is tangible and visible. Later, Jesus allowed some to touch His feet. The message to Mary is prophetic to the Church in the resurrected life. Before even the touch of the most devoted persons, one has first to ascend in spirit to the throne. God first, and then human touches cannot have other effects than salutary ones. Moreover there is a time of adoration and a time of quick action. "Touch not, But go. Give the message to my brethren." And it was a message which included first ascension to the Father, and that the one who is Father and God to Christ is also Father and God to the disciples. Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples as she had been commanded.

Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene are three types of the Invisible Church. None of them is a complete portrait, but the three united give the picture of what a real Christian must become. Silent lessons, which, taken by the Holy Spirit, will deepen and lead the Invisible Church toward the perfect communion with the Lord and a prompt loving service to humanity.

CHAPTER X

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

John 20:19-21

The disciples were slow in accepting that Jesus was risen. The Lord condescended to give them many infallible proofs. The day will come when they should utter the fearless message, that the One who had been crucified had been raised by God the Father. The Lord always condescends to people who are in good faith, by which word we mean, people who are willing to believe and to be persuaded. Only with such is the gospel message effectual.

A question could be asked: why were the disciples so sceptical of Jesus' resurrection, since they, themselves, had seen three instances of dead people brought back to life through Jesus' power? We mean, the son of the widow of Nain, the daughter of Jarius, and Lazarus. Weighty question is this, which can be answered by considering that when these three came back to life, Jesus was with the disciples. His personality charmed them and overpowered any mental difficulty they could have entertained. But the case of Jesus' resurrection was different. The Beloved One had been slain in the crucifixion: the worst had happened; and

all this meant to the simple followers, not victory but defeat.

Jesus had raised others, but where was another to raise Him? Had not the enemies themselves taunted the dying Martyr with the words, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save"? The benighted disciples might have thought: "He raised others, Himself He cannot raise." It takes a long time even for most mature saints to see and understand the Father's love and power. It was the Father who raised Jesus from the dead, through the power of the Holy Spirit. But the theme of our book is the Invisible Church; so we hasten to the subject of this chapter.

The disciples had already heard the message from the Magdalene, that Jesus was risen. The extraordinary event was believed and not believed: their minds being in a maze between their own experiences, disappointments, and the affirmations of the Beloved Master. In such cases people of the same mind like to be together. We read: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." Rotherham puts the acts and words of Jesus in a closer connection, by translating: "And this saying, He pointed out both His hands and His side unto them. The disciples therefore rejoiced, seeing the Lord." Slight difference in the translation; yes, but much richness is conveyed by a slight difference. May the Holy Spirit take us to that room and make us spectators of the event.

Fear of the Jews, not of the Gentiles. Far it be, any word against this great and tried people. They are a representative class of those religionists who, shut in their scrupulousness and dogmas, refuse any further light. These are

the most bitter enemies to the Invisible Church. The disciples were afraid and locked the doors. An impossible difficulty was right there, but there are no difficulties with the Lord; and, by projection, neither for the Invisible Church. Without knocking or any word of announcement, the doors remaining shut from the Jewish standpoint, Jesus entered. He appeared, "came and stood in the midst." It is the "midst" of the group, and prophetic also the "midst" of each individual. He is the controlling and dominating power in the midst of the Church. Although the doors may remain shut, the Lord's plan still goes on. He said unto them, "Peace unto you." This was the first message when He was announced to the shepherds; and this is the message entrusted to the disciples, by which they have to begin their missionary work; and this, also, the message of the Risen Lord. Only after He has given peace, will He proceed in His commands and teachings. Let us remember that Jesus' words creates what He speaks. He did not limit Himself to that assurance; but, without allowing any delay, while saying those words, He presented the credentials that He was Himself and none other. He pointed out His hands and side. The disciples could see the deep wounds, marks of the crucifixion.

Why these acts? The enemy also, being a spirit, can enter through closed doors; he can counterfeit many things in religion, but is not permitted to carry the marks of the crucified One. There is a prophecy by which the Lord assures of His unfailing love: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me."

At the words of peace, simultaneous with the pointing to His side, the disciples rejoiced. They were filled with assurance, for they had seen the Lord. Power and

the memorial of the crucifixion go together. Jesus did not stop but continued, saying unto them again: "Peace be unto you. As my Father hath sent me: even so send I you." The words, "as," "so," call for a study of Jesus' relation to the Father, which relation must be the pattern and goal of the Church. Just as the Father, moved by eternal love, sent the Son and entrusted to Him our names, so, in like manner, Jesus, filled with the Father's love, sends the disciples, entrusting them with a mission. There is, however, a difference: Jesus knew always all those who had been given to Him. The Church, step by step, discovers people which have from eternity been given to her; but which are being presented to her, not in one moment, but as she walks in the way. Things and people become to the Invisible Church like a book which is being opened as we keep reading it. At this point, it seems profitable to meditate Ephesians 2:8-10, especially verse 10, which reads: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained [prepared] that we should walk in them." There are other scriptures which illustrate, that people to whom we must speak are by God Himself put in our way, that we may minister unto them. There is no place for proselyting in the Invisible Church, but only a steady look on Jesus that we may—spirit, soul, and body being subjugated,—depend on Jesus, step by step. It is ascending from Him which will result in working for Him, looking only for His glory. As Jesus aimed at making people see the Father in Him, so the ambition of the Church must be, that Jesus only may be seen and glorified.

What a devotion to the One who had sent Him! what a loving patience towards faulty humanity and slow-learning disciples! what a study must be the study of the Church, in order to fulfill the command between these two prepositions—*as, so!*

CHAPTER XI

FROM JERUSALEM TO SAMARIA

How distant are we from the Apostolic Church! And, alas! even the primitive church distanced itself from Jesus' methods. The Church was born on the day of Pentecost; the Holy Spirit took charge of assembling the hearers, and led the preacher. The Apostles were witnesses of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection; signs were performed and miracles in Jesus' name. A spirit of unselfishness began to manifest itself in many Christians; the Lord Himself increased the church membership. Prosperity was written on the page of the primitive church; but real prosperity did not last when the church became numerous and influential. In vain do we seek light in the mere literal narrative. By the Holy Spirit, we have to learn to read between the lines, weighing causes and effects.

There were in the apostolic churches various elements: some strictly Hebraic; some Hellenistic. These currents could not help to come some day into conflict. It is God's plan to emphasize truth, and give light through conflicts and oppositions. Three words may help us in understanding God's plan in the universe: *Simple—Variety—Synthesis*. It is a synthesis which is the result of antithesis. But let us go to our subject.

In the sixth chapter of Acts, we see a kind of Christian communism which was only a prophetic miniature of what the Church will be in the end, when really no one will call anything his own. After a great principle has been announced, first enthusiastic beginnings appear which end, most of the time, in failure. The principle remains, and the victory, which seems at first to have been won by human energy, will be attained as a painful result of sufferings and disappointments. Beware of quick growth, of easily gotten wealth. Everything in the universe moves by painful struggles and groanings, so to say. This the Church had and has to learn.

The sixth chapter of Acts, though showing numerical progress, is really the beginning of failures in the Jerusalem community. Let us understand, we say "failure" in man's planning, but not in God's program. The failures of man are part of God's program, for by them, He constrains the Church to enter, more and more, the plan by which she must really become—The Invisible Church. Certainly the Apostles were right, that they had to give themselves, primarily, to the ministry of prayer and of the word. Their suggestion of electing deacons was expedient, the best that could be done under the circumstances.

Good, spiritual men were these deacons, but the higher church power has, so to say, given them this commission: "You serve tables, we are the preachers." But some deeper revelation of the great love of God towards all mankind, and the complete necessity of setting aside Judaism, comprising also the magnificent temple, had already crept in.

It happens, many times, that those who start a movement become accustomed to some limitations, such as a peaceful compromise. So the primitive church entered, so to say, a certain tacit understanding with Judaism. The temple was venerated; it was there that Peter and John went at the "hour of prayer." We have no hour of prayer in

the New Testament, for we should pray always—i. e., being in a spirit of prayer. There was a certain tolerance between Judaism and Christianity, and this, too, was in God's providence—but only for a time. The day will come, and came, when Christianity, free from the fetters of the old, which had accomplished its purpose, would move on.

From one of those ironies of history, the new movement began right among the people to whom had been granted as a privilege, "You serve tables." It began with a man who in all probability was of Greek culture, although a Jew by descendance. At the name of *Stephen* my heart is filled with love and reverence. A Christian giant is he who appears and disappears like a flash of lightning, and, as lightning, indicates in the dead of night the way which others should follow. It is not a mistake to trace the ministry of St. Paul to the influence of Stephen, and to consider the Apostle to the Gentiles as a prolongation of the man who had been ordered to serve tables.

There are some events which are presented as starting from nowhere, from no beginning; but they have a background which is unwritten. On this light, we have to read the notice about Stephen in Acts 6:8-15. This man, full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, full of power and grace, soon after he had been delegated to the tables, by a divine design, came into prominence outside the church established circle. The Lord granted to him to perform "wonders and miracles among the people."

It is understood from the narrative that he visited various synagogues: note in the list, the synagogue of Cilicia; note that from Tarsus, an important city in Cilicia, came the great persecutor and future disciple of Stephen—Saul of Tarsus. Who knows how many times the young and ambitious Cilician scholar entered into conflict with the spirit-filled Stephen! who knows how many times he, Saul, was forced to silence by the irresistible eloquence of the

servant of the tables! There is enough in the letter to base more than a supposition, that Saul was one of the main factors of Stephen's death, for the ambitious scholar did not see any way, except death, by which he might get rid of a shining star, which almost threw in the shade the scholarship and ability of the Cilician debater. If we have to look life in the face, we cannot deny that Stephen was a victim, not only of Jewish intolerance, but also of jealousy aroused from his brilliant character and divine eloquence.

Charges were brought against Stephen, new charges, different from those that had afflicted the Apostles, that Stephen was speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God, and that he had said, "that this [mark the word "this"] Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." It is true that the witnesses had been suborned, to substantiate, in a few words, the charges, but it is undeniable that the preaching of Stephen paved the way to the accusation. Never such charges against the Apostles. Let us listen to the enemies, for by them we learn much of Stephen's ministry. Moses was given a secondary place in importance to Jesus, as a servant is compared to his master. The temple and the Mosaic Law were only for a time. The despised Nazarene, He had been, who had prophesied that the temple should not remain but be overthrown, stones above stones. Jesus had spoken of the *new* which would supersede the old. Important part of the accusation was the subject of the Deity. They charged that Stephen blasphemed against God. Indeed, Stephen had presented Jesus not merely as the Son of God, but with a strong emphasis that all power was given to Him and that without Him, it is impossible to understand God.

Stephen had really understood Christ, observed His teachings and ideals which he was proclaiming with courage and clearness. After Jesus, he was the first martyr.

When Stephen was taken before the council, the Lord stepped in with a special manifestation. We read: "And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." They fixed their eyes on him, trying to discover the monster who dared so much, to the point of despising what to the Jews was most dear, and so profane, to the point of even blaspheming God. Before any procedure, the judges were, by instinct, led to look on something horrible, but what they saw threw them in confusion. The face of Stephen became like the face of an angel—messenger.

We associate "beauty" with angelic beings, and we are right; but in this case it was not angelic beauty alone: the face of Stephen had such a look and determination, as to say, without speaking: "Here is a real messenger from the throne of God." Those judges trembled. Another judge had trembled before Stephen's Master, and all judges have to tremble, at least a moment, before Innocence. An impression ran through those hearts and minds: "This man might really be a messenger of God." The impression was voiced by the paternal and meek address of the high priest, in whose trembling voice we detect that he was really touched by that face. The high priest said: "Are these things so?" A gentle, pathetic question from the chief judge. We almost detect the voice of another judge, when he referred the whole cause to the accused one, almost exhorting Him to defend Himself—we mean, Pilate and Jesus. If Stephen had wished to compromise, he would have won the day, and his accusers would have been defeated. But Stephen was Stephen, and he had to die.

It is not in the scope of this book to examine his speech before the council. It is a masterpiece of gentleness and truth; a great mind and a great heart was preaching one of the greatest sermons which humanity possesses. This man never lost the sense of his duty to the Lord, and vibra-

tions were touching him from heaven and from the audience: he was sensible to both. The message, all at once, became severe; and he was forced to use hard but just words. His enemies became enraged, and began to gnash their teeth. Stephen's message could not continue, for they would not have listened: he looked up, "and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing [not sitting] at the right hand of God." Standing, being ready to encourage and receive the martyr. Stephen proclaimed: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." It was the climax. The end was soon told: he was stoned out of the city. Jesus had been killed out of Jerusalem. The witnesses laid the clothes at a young man's feet and stoned Stephen. Saul had not been a witness: the main agents in a drama do not make themselves witnesses, but procure them. He—Saul—was there to ascertain the end, and he must have heard Stephen when he called upon God and said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And Saul surely did see Stephen when he knelt down and "cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." They, all the people; he, Saul, surely noticed when Stephen, without any murmur or any motion of agony, died like a lamb. The scripture says, "He fell asleep."

We invite the reader to consider the scriptures (Acts 8:1-3). Saul became like a mad persecutor. Reverent men assisted at the burial of the martyr and made great lamentation for him. A great scattering came of the church people. By a divine plan of providence, the Apostles still remained in Jerusalem. This scattering extended the witness of Christ to other places and reached as far as Samaria. The Jerusalem nest had been stirred, the eagles began to fly in many directions. Ecclesiastical people will say: "Misfortune, the work of God is being destroyed." God says: "Thus, I accomplish my plan, continuing to build the Invisible Church."

CHAPTER XII

FROM SAMARIA TO THE WILDERNESS

We are not writing the history of the primitive church, nor of any of the Apostles, but only touch as much as serving our purpose to present the Invisible Church—viz., to point out events and methods which show God's ways so different from that of man's. It has been the persecution which gave birth to the scattering of many Christians from Jerusalem, by which the gospel-preaching reached as far as Samaria. Samaria, we know, had been mentioned by the Lord as the third landmark of the missionary program. Jesus, before ascending, had commanded: "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The limitation, "not Samaria nor the Gentiles," which had been set during Jesus' earthly ministry had been taken away. Samaria should now be evangelized, but only after great sufferings and a kind of seeming failure had been experienced in Jerusalem and in Judea.

The man, who has been mostly used for Samaria, was Philip—not the Apostle Philip, but the deacon,—the second in the list of the appointed "servants of the tables." A sad question before we proceed: what about those tables, and that shadowy communism in the Jerusalem church? All

went to pieces of all man's programs. There was, of course, a noble ideal: we say "noble," humanly speaking, for it is only the Lord who prepares events and moulds men for the events.

Then Philip went to Samaria; his ministry was a success. People heard the gospel proclamation and saw the many miracles which were performed. But it was in Samaria that the gospel-preaching met, for the first time, sorcery and witchcraft. The history of Simon the sorcerer is wrapped in a mystery. Many tales have been fabricated on his aim. It is not impossible to believe that he was connected with some kind of religion which today would be considered as some branch of theosophy. We find, in the Gospel and Epistles, hints to some sorts of voluntary religions. Should we, someday, write on this subject, it would be worthwhile to illustrate the relation of the extremes between bodily rigors and torments with the extreme of license. Any self-made holiness rebounds to its extreme. There is no holiness without the grace which is in Jesus Christ.

Simon the magician is a representative man. We cannot imagine him a coarse and vulgar being, rather the contrary: he seems to have been a man of refinement, with keen human abilities. Simon had been the idol of Samaria before Philip had arrived. But, now, the favor of the people turned to the evangelist and left the magician. Like all the astute politicians, Simon knew how to take a defeat, and feigned enthusiasm for the new faith. The scripture record says: "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." Someone translates: "Simon was in constant attendance on Philip." Some people have to show importance one way or another.

What kind of belief was that of the sorcerer? We will soon discover. When he saw, later, that by the "laying on

of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also of this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost."

Peter's sharp answer would have made anyone tremble, but the crafty Simon knew how to steer in every wind. Peter had said to him that he had neither part nor lot in that matter; that his heart was not right in the sight of God and had exhorted him to repentance, in order that the thought of his heart might be forgiven him; for he, the sorcerer, was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity of unrighteousness. The sorcerer was not touched by being pointed to his inner life; and showed concern only for the visible. He answered the Apostle: "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."

The sorcerer disappears forever from the gospel narrative. We do not know if he remained long in Samaria, or immediately went elsewhere. Any missionary society, or church constituency would have done its best to fortify its ministry in the presence of such a dangerous element like Simon the magician, who now had been stirred to open enmity, since he could no longer hope for anything from the Christian leaders. But the Apostles—Peter and John—returned to Jerusalem, after visiting other villages of the Samaritans. The new church, humanly speaking, must have seemed safe with the presence of the successful evangelist. But, even the evangelist had to leave that important citadel of Christianity, and no substitute was indicated.

Different, vastly different, are God's methods from those of missionary societies. An "angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." Strange command indeed! to abandon a prosperous work without organizing anything there: a work facing dangers; and he himself, the man of large crowds,

to be sent in a desert. Missionary leaders today would laugh even at the idea. Yet, God's command was imperative and began with the word "Arise," which means a resurrection power, at every new beginning. Philip knew God's voice and obeyed. No special accommodations; no preparations were made for the trip; no documentary evidence of ministry were given to him. He went alone in the desert way.

Travelling on foot, as the most poor do, he trudged the dusty road when, lo, he discovered in the distance a chariot. Travelling southward, in that vehicle, was a man of social importance, an officer in full charge of the treasures of the Queen of Ethiopia. He had come to Jerusalem to worship. Nothing we know of the past of this man, and nothing will we know of his future after the narrative of Acts (chapter 8).

The Holy Spirit spoke to Philip: "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." *Join thyself*. What a word!, suggesting oneness of the servant and the service. The man was reading a portion from the scroll of the prophecies of Isaiah. The foot-traveler, tired or not—we do not know—had to hasten his pace to reach the chariot. Drawing closer, he heard the treasurer reading aloud. Raising his voice, Philip called on him with a brief question: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Rude question, indeed, and offensive, especially if we consider that it was addressed by a man who, travelling on foot, must have appeared rather like a beggar. But the Lord was back of the reader, the reading, and the questioning. Someday we will know the history of the treasurer and how the Lord had prepared him for that event.

The reading had engaged all of his attention. The man of the court could not understand how it was possible for a man to exist who should suffer like a sheep under the shearers and be killed like a lamb without opening

his mouth. The ideals of humanity in those days,—perhaps even in our day,—were not to exhort meekness, but brute force and cunning. Indeed, what dominates the world is either violence or guile; brute force or astuteness—perhaps both. The passage reported in the eighth chapter of Acts gives, as written by Isaiah, also these words: "In His humiliation, His judgement was taken away." These last words are not in the text of Isaiah 53. In passing, we note that it is the Holy Spirit reading the scriptures to us. But to return:

"Understandest thou?"

The man, who had been touched, not by brilliant declamations or descriptions, but by the unique portrait of a great sufferer, was anxious himself to have someone to whom he might communicate his mental problem: "Who is this man? Is it possible that there has been such a one? Is it an imagination or a real history?" But even imagination comes from the stage of culture to which people have arrived. Who, then, is this man? the prophet himself, or another?

He, the treasurer, needed a teacher; and, lo, the teacher was at hand: a poor traveler on the dusty road. More as if he were speaking to himself than giving a direct answer, the eunuch answered: "How can I, [how much humility in that I!], except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." How long they travelled, before the treasurer, becoming more and more enlightened on the life of Jesus and desirous to go to the last limits of obedience, we do not know. With an ear to the teacher and a look to the road, the treasurer kept drinking in, at the same time spying if he could discover water, that he might be soon baptized. Water was discovered and he stopped the preacher with a practical question, which meant: "I believe, I fully desire the One thou hast preached unto me. 'What doth hinder me to be bap-

tized?" "Tender, earnest question is this, revealing the heart of the man who was ready and burning for the next step. Nothing hindered, for the Ethiopian was a believer with his entire heart. The treasurer "commanded the chariot to stand still." Even these words are rich in meaning. They seem superfluous, for, by reading that they both went into the water, it is clear that the trip should be suspended. But words have a long projection. "Chariot" means much in the scriptural language, and stands for human activity and energy: a command to make the chariot still and go down into obedience. "They went both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he [Philip] baptized him."

Now, what a grand future could have been planned between these two men, Christ's servant and a man of authority in a kingdom. Many missionary enterprises could have been devised. The two individuals, drawn close to each other by the happy event would go together: Philip, supplying the preaching; the treasurer, money and influence. What a splendid missionary society would be the outcome of such a union! But—one of God's "buts" which upsets human reasonings,—but, "when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."

The curtains fall: we see, we know no more of the treasurer. Souls belong to the Lord; He knows how and through whom to work. Let no one deem himself a creditor of anyone whom he has served in Christ's Name.

Now, the most reasonable event which a missionary would have expected to read would be something like this:

"The evangelist did suddenly appear to the congregation of Samaria and there, among choruses of hallelujahs and clapping of hands, related the unique event of the desert road. Then, one

of the clerks wrote the report and publicized this special report to the Glory of God."

But disappointments face us even here. "Philip was not sent back to Samaria; he was found at Azotus: and passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea." There we will find him, if we keep reading, towards the close of the book of Acts.

God's ways are not like those of men. Indeed! we need to know more and more of the Invisible God and of the Invisible Church.

CHAPTER XIII

ANTIOCH

Past events many times are both history and prophecy. The conversion of Saul speaks of the power and love of the Lord Jesus in caring for the Church. It was a time of distress and help came just in time to avoid the destruction of the Damascus' Assembly—and who knows of how many others! The mode of the Lord's appearance to Saul, at midday, when the sun blazes most fiercely; and the information that the light which circumfused Saul was more than sunlight, and the various details of the narrative—all are a lesson to the Church, that she must depend only on the Invisible Lord who knows how and when to make Himself visible.

Many have written on the life of St. Paul, and it would be out of place to occupy ourselves with it in this book. Our aim is to point out some of God's methods, to keep and advance His Church. Saul's conversion had been a great acquisition to the Church; but, aside from the stopping of the persecution, Saul's ministry did not become prominent at once. The Church and Saul had to learn that no one is indispensable. Between the lines of the scanty narrative, we detect that Saul's energetic efforts were rather dangerous. The brethren had to send him away. We do

not enter the argument of when he first visited Jerusalem, or when he entered into deeper solitude: we desire to illustrate that the man himself had to undergo severe disappointments, and a discipline of patience and humiliation before he could really become an efficient servant of Jesus Christ. Missionary societies would have feasted and soon honored such a man, especially considering that he came from the citadel of the adversaries. Yet, God's plans are different than man's.

We do not need to peruse the grand chapter concerning Peter's going to Cornelius. It marks the beginning of the preaching to the Gentiles. Of course, there, too, we see how the Invisible God works visible results through those who have no other credentials than His word and command. But, we hasten to the subject of our chapter—Antioch.

There was another disturbance in Jerusalem on account of Peter's having gone to the Gentiles. The Apostle rehearsed his experiences; the scrupulous brethren held their peace and glorified God. But soon came the information of a larger spreading of the Gospel. There was a latent antagonism between two parties: one, more strict to the letter and to the traditions of the past; the other, launching out in the realm of the Spirit. This antagonism never abated while Jerusalem and its temple remained standing. They were brethren coming from Jerusalem who spied Peter's liberty in his dealings with the Gentiles. The Lord kept Jerusalem for a time; but the day had to come when temple and city had to go, so to say, out of the map of the Christians. A new important place was coming into prominence, Antioch. We read: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were

come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." Always some new advance, without the big "O.K." of Jerusalem's headquarter. When the preaching became successful, and many turned unto the Lord, the tidings arrived in Jerusalem; and they sent, not one of the Twelve, but Barnabas who had been surnamed, "Son of Consolation."

Barnabas was the same one who, among the various principals, alone had showed a kind face to Saul of Tarsus; he, the son of consolation, had even vouched for the sincerity of the new convert. Great was the influence of this kindly man; but the atmosphere of Jerusalem was not for Saul, so he had to leave. It takes time for people and places which have been of great importance to see that the Lord has other people and other places, also. Barnabas then went to Antioch. "When he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave [abide] unto the Lord." The Holy Spirit gives the reason for Barnabas' procedure, and the giving itself proves that Barnabas' ways are not very common in the churches. We read: "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." Were not the others also good people? Many were, of course; but Barnabas' goodness refers to a rare quality of the heart which is above any proselyting spirit, and makes us think of God's magnanimity which makes His sun to shine also on the wicked. Barnabas was a man who was willing to go out of his circle and look for good wherever it might be found. Such people, perhaps not great speakers themselves, are prepared to discover and encourage the Invisible Church: we mean, to give a helping hand to those who do not gain a ready approval from the "official" church. We are discussing types rather than individuals, for we do not exclude the well-intentioned Jerusalem brethren from the Invisible Church. They all—we mean, the Elect,—sooner

or later, progress in the realm of the Invisible. But there is a time when some individuals have to be pioneers and stand alone against opposition, perhaps even malediction.

When the gentle Barnabas appraised the importance of the Christian work in Antioch, he recognized—oh! really good man—that someone else was needed. He had not forgotten Saul, and had treasured in his heart the testimony of the man who had been converted on the way to Damascus. We do not know how many times the son of consolation, who was also a man of peace, had considered that Saul's ministry would be useful in the Church; he bade his time. Antioch seemed to him a more liberal place. Without consulting anyone, he took on himself the responsibility. We read: "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch." A few words, back of which is an unwritten history of Saul of Tarsus—alone, hated by the Jews, unwelcomed by the Christians. And we surmise the various searchings of the good man, Barnabas, in locating the lonely Saul. "He found him" is more than a material finding. Saul, though embittered by his experiences, had remained a Christian. Barnabas took him to Antioch. Something happened which seems written just as a chronicle but which has a place in some ministries. There came a famine in Jerusalem. The Christians collected some relief to send to the brethren who dwelt in Judea, and they sent it to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Let no one pass this incident in which we see the man of kindness, accompanying to Jerusalem, not to preach there, but to appear with a token of charity, the man who had left Jerusalem in disappointment; and who, certainly, would not have had the courage to return there alone.

We do not stop at the twelfth chapter of the book of Acts, except by mentioning that God's providence permitted the Apostle James to be killed; and another, Peter, to

be, by the ministry of an angel, liberated from prison. We have to familiarize with God's sovereignty which overrules all things and knows how to keep His Church. Let us return to our subject:

The church in Antioch became prosperous, enriched by prophets and teachers. At the head of the list stands Barnabas; at the close, Saul. As the two men, the protector and the protected, were—one, the scout; the other, the rear guard. As they ministered unto the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said: "separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

There was no sending by an official body of the Church, as had occurred previously; but the Lord showed the real method, that workers had to be selected by the Holy Spirit; and, then, to be sent by the Church.

"When they had fasted and prayed and layed their hands on them, they sent them away." It is no disparagement to the Twelve to note here that none of them were among those who prayed and laid hands on Barnabas and Saul. Important as it is,—the narrative about the missionary trip of the two men,—we have to pass to other incidents. A dissention came to the Church in the relation between Jews and Gentiles which caused the convention in Jerusalem, as is written in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. We would like to be silent about the separation of Barnabas and Paul, (Saul had become Paul); others have dealt on it at length, expressing various opinions. Was the separation caused by too much gentleness in Barnabas and too much severity in Paul? We do not judge. Perhaps, both had to learn some important lesson. Some have to acquire severity and firmness; others, to become more patient and forbearing. The scripture says: "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder, one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas and departed." Sad incident,

which was deeply ingrained in the hearts of these two Christians, but which in God's providence worked for good in both of them. It teaches us that we all are fallible, and the Lord permits that we all come, from time to time, to the end of ourselves, always prepared to make a funeral to the past and start anew.

CHAPTER XIV

PHILIPPI—THESSALONICA—ATHENS

It seemed to Paul that they should visit some churches in Asia which, of course, needed confirmation. But the time had come for a new departure, which was a new beginning. We have to note that each beginning did not come according to the logic of the leaders of the church at the time. "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." (Some translations have, "The Spirit of Jesus.") Here we have a clear conflict between Church's and pure Holy Ghost's leadership. How long the conflict endured, we do not know. But it is not unreasonable to suppose that it lasted a good while.

Any movement, though starting under the absolute guidance of the Spirit, after a time, is in danger of becoming crystallized and, fixing on past experiences, of making some regulations which, to all appearance, are good and needed. Moreover, the mind of the Lord is not revealed once forever, that a man might pocket and keep it in a booklet for reference.

We have to learn to "count our days" that we may acquire a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90). While the beginning of wisdom is in having the fear of the Lord, wisdom itself is mature only when man reaches the conclusion, that he ultimately knows nothing; consequently, he feels the need of God's continuous guidance. This is one of the lessons in the book of Job. The patriarch feared God, and had the beginning of wisdom; yet Elihu exhorted him to listen, in order that he might learn wisdom. Only after the messenger had spoken and God had thundered His various teachings and questionings did Job learn wisdom, which taught him his nothingness and enabled him to a new kind of ministry, a new beginning.

Paul and the Church had to learn to "count their days," for the Lord has food according to the days. The word "bread" has many meanings, including communion and guidance. The words, "forbidden and the spirit of Jesus suffered not," mean much more than a guidance. It was necessary to put a dead stop to Paul's activities, so that he and his companions might be enabled to hear new orders.

Intense, energetic natures do not easily change. Yet, the Lord teaches us that we have to be firm in the goal, but pliable in the methods. The Christian aim must be one, to do God's will; but the methods are discovered by us, day by day, if not, moment by moment. It requires such pliability that we may be ready to move in every direction, or to stop at any moment. The human mind suffers, of course, until it gets used to the mind of Christ. Paul and his companions had to stop and give up their fine plans of visiting needy churches. In this condition Paul received, in Troas, the vision of the man who pleaded with him: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Someone translates: "And bring us succor." It was a call to another continent. Paul related the vision to his brethren; and, being confirmed by them, they went as far as Philippi.

No one will compare the mission in Philippi to most of the missionary enterprises. No committee waited for them; no documents were given to the missionaries. They were launched, entirely, under the dependence of God alone. They had two kinds of converts: some gentle souls, women, who were gathered, according to Jewish custom, for prayer in a certain place; and, later, a rude man, the jailer. The methods were different. Lydia was willing to listen, and the Lord rewarded her disposition by opening her heart to believe. The jailer, moved by an earthquake and supposing that the men he had ill-treated had escaped, was about to take his life, when Paul cried out that they had not escaped. The effects, in both cases, were similar, in opening the hearts to generosity. A noble work had been started in Philippi; yet, the ones who had been used to begin, had to go away. Seemingly, the work was abandoned. It looks like a replica of the treasurer on the desert way. Later, we find a great church in Philippi.

Some people observe that Paul, on occasions, appealed to his being a Roman citizen. He was such before his conversion and by birth. The appeal was made, so that he might not be beaten before being examined; it had nothing to do with the permission or not to preach the Gospel. This must be left absolutely in God's hands who knows where to open or close doors.

Thessalonica.

Each place has a special message. The message of Thessalonica is in the accusation of the Jews: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also . . . and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." Much have we to learn from the words of the enemies. The conflict with Caesar, though insinuated for hatred's sake, was real and acute. The Apostles did not preach anything against Caesar; they

only proclaimed the Kingdom of God and Jesus as King. But the conclusion is that there is antagonism between the two kingdoms. The preaching was not done in a moderate, halfway manner, as to remain on good terms with everybody, but was done with power, in a clear-cut way. The accusation was, that such a preaching was turning the world upside down. It is so, if we are really preachers of Christ. How, then, have we to expect the recognition of the world?

Athens.

The city of philosophy and of art. There we find Paul embittered by seeing the city full of idols. As the Athenians used to spend much time gossiping and discussing, it came to pass that the Apostle exchanged words with some of them. The news was spread about the stranger. "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." They considered "resurrection" as another god. "Babbler," "rag-picker," "base fellow," the original word means all that. That was the qualification which the Doctor of the Gentiles gained by the Greeks.

They took him to their highest court, and Paul delivered unto them that masterpiece of speech, in which he spoke to them of the Unknown God, to whom they had dedicated an altar. If man should be converted through human ability, there, indeed, was a capable man speaking! a man who knew sociology, reminding them that God has made of one blood all nations of men. He, Paul, the scholar, made scholarly quotations, delving into the literature of the listeners, trying to win them by quoting their own poets. In vain! Men are not converted this way; they need to be brought to the knowledge of their sinful condition, and be directed to the remedy—the Saviour. The

speech was received with mockery, while some in a courteous tone said: "We will hear thee again of this." Lesson is this to the Church: no amount of coaxing people will take the place of the simplicity of the Gospel.

We are sure that the memory of Athens remained in Paul's heart, when he wrote to the Corinthians. They also were Greeks. To them Paul proclaimed that he had decided to preach unto them the real wisdom and power of God, which is Christ Crucified. Let theologians qualify the mission of Paul in Athens as they please. Only a few people believed. But it is not a failure to consider that the wisdom of this world is antagonistic to God's wisdom. Far from us to judge Paul, that in preaching to the Athenians, he tried to please them by appealing to their own altar and their own poets. We have to follow, most of the times, as God does in nature—the curve of least resistance. But the concluding admonition to the Church remains:

"So Paul departed from among them." So mocked, and put off to another time.

CHAPTER XV

ROME

Acts 25-28

"Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgement seat . . . I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus answered, hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go."

From now on, Jerusalem and its priesthood, even Jerusalem's Christianity, remain in the background; and Imperial Rome looms before the prisoner, Paul. His experiences from now on are all mixed with things which savor of the place of his judgment. The governor, rough and haughty; the man who had the name of king without any real authority, Agrippa; his sister, princess Bernice; civil and military dignitaries—all pass before God's prisoner: he gives his testimony in the courtroom, and emphasis is on these words: "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

Paul would have been released, thus concluded Festus in a private interview with king Agrippa, if he had not appealed to Caesar. But, there was no other way than by being sent to Rome. The cities we have mentioned: Jeru-

salem, Samaria, Antioch, and Rome,—and we could name several others,—are all stages in the pilgrimage of the Church. Each of them giving a message which ends in one word—*Disappointment*. The terminal point of the Church is the heavenly Jerusalem whose founder and maker is God; there, the Church must make its abode—spiritual abode—while yet in this life. Acts 27 describes, in a graphic way, the slow navigation toward Italy and Paul's experience. He himself, with the others, had lost any hope of being saved, and the Lord sent an angel to encourage him. Thus runs the report: "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." Lives should be saved, but the ship would be lost; this was not good news for the shipmaster, for the rich ones of this world prefer the loss of lives, (their's excepted), to the loss of a large property. That ship is a picture also of all the accumulations of properties to which the visible church becomes attached. The Lord, someday, will warn them, that they must be willing to lose everything in order to have their souls saved. It is a sad fact in church history, that many in Christendom have been fighting for the ship and have imperiled the souls. Just a look at the many contentions for church buildings, basilicas, etc. will force us to consider the angelic message to Paul: the ship must be lost!

We are reminded, by the association of words, of the prophecy of the faithful Jeremiah who said to his disciple Baruch: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, Behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life I will give unto thee for a prey in all

places whither thou goest." Returning to our subject, we learn from the record in the book of Acts that the ship was lost and the passengers were all saved: some did swim; others caught hold of boards and broken pieces—they all reached shore without any property, but having their lives saved.

They found themselves on an island. There the Lord had provided from the hands of people, strangers to them, a kind reception. There, too, the Apostle had to learn some new experience: a viper, warmed-up by the fire, had fastened on to his hand, but he shook the hand and the beast was destroyed by the fire. The Apostle received no harm. God's power to His people is manifested everywhere. There, too, on that island, the Lord had prepared some special miracles to be performed by Paul. The chief man, who had lodged them, had his father very sick. Paul prayed and laid hands on him, and the man was healed. Other sick people were also healed. The governor of the place honored Paul and others; and, when they departed, he loaded them with such things as were necessary.

It was not the terminal of the voyage, but an interruption, to teach the Church, that in serving God, she should not be set on schedules, but learn what we find written in human timetables, "Subject to change without notice." The interruption was in God's plan, for the benefit of the islanders and for the teaching of the Church, that comfort and provisions are provided where we least expect when we are in the will of God. Before they reached Rome, when they arrived at Appiiforum, Paul was met by some brethren; when he saw them, he thanked God and took courage. Another extreme was met, preparing for another beginning.

In Rome, the centurion delivered him to the captain of the guard. Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with a

soldier that kept him. It is not in our plan to write about the double captivity of the Apostle, nor to examine the writings of that captivity, epistles which mark the most important part of his ministry. We think that he served the Lord better when he was in prison than when he was free. For the scope of this chapter, we point to three events.

First. He called the chiefs of the Jews together, and expounded to them his case, as to *why* he was a prisoner in Rome. Paul was still a Jew at heart; he loved his nation, and hoped for its conversion; but they gave him a cold reply: "We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." Kind answer it seems, but it is a kindness which aimed at closing the argument. On a certain day, Paul spoke to them: some believed. Of course, it is a superficial belief of the people of the world, who say, "Very good," but remain in their opinion. Some believed not. Having the Jews come in a body, no one made an individual decision but discussed among themselves if they should agree or not; they did not agree and departed. No persecution, but indifference was shown to the great prisoner. Indifference is worse than hatred. Paul dismissed his countrymen with the words of Isaiah (sixth chapter) and concluded that the salvation was being sent to the Gentiles. They went their way. "Paul dwelt two whole years in his old hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ."

The book of Acts has here an abrupt closing, and this, too, is a lesson to the Church, which is inclined to make

detailed, elaborate missionary records, by which records the attention is focused more on the servant than on the Lord Himself. Paul had to learn also some lesson, that the Lord Himself chose for him the audience; he could not go to the people, for he was a prisoner: the people were sent to him, and he received them.

Without annulling some movements which Christians are commanded to do, the Church has to learn that, in the conclusion, it is God Himself who sends those who have to be evangelized. It is not out of place to remember the Jew, spoken of in Zechariah; "the man who lives to the praise of God," who goes, alone, to Jerusalem, asking no one to follow him, and yet ten people run after him and take hold of him, expressing the desire to go with him to the city.

Second. How many were converted during Paul's captivities we do not know, nor do we know of how many brethren visited him. The informations are scanty. Just a hint is given at the end of the Epistle to the Philippians: "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." This Caesar was Nero, one of the monsters of humanity: some servants of this monster were saved through the ministry of the prisoner.

Among those who visited him, there is a special mentioning of Onesiphorus. This man, an obscure Christian, when in Rome, sought diligently where the prisoner was and often refreshed him, being not ashamed of his chain. An "obscure" Christian, we say: we have to learn not to fix our hopes in man, not even on our best friends, for only the Lord will raise comforters and helpers from the most unexpected quarters and individuals.

Third. The second Epistle to Timothy is the swan song of the Apostle. No one can read it without noting that the heart of this man was swollen with disappointments. If it were in our plan to examine it, we should consider how Timothy had become timid and almost ashamed; we would linger at some length on the meaning of the words, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved the present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Delmatia. Only Luke is with me." It seemed that the best groups which had been around the once popular preacher were found wanting. Then, an indirect confession of a sad incident of the separation with Barnabas on account of Mark. The fiery Apostle had mellowed with years; he wrote: "Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." It was the same Mark whom he did not want in company, and on account of whom there had been the sharp contention with the gentle Barnabas. A sad note of warning about Alexander, the coppersmith, a trouble-maker was he; let Timothy beware of him.

A sad remark: "At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." It is a letter which shows shipwreck everywhere, and only that "life" was saved. Where are the great companions of the Apostle? what of the so many churches once prosperous? Ruins were everywhere. The man had come to the end of himself. Only one confidence kept his spirit: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." No dependence on his manifold activities and abilities, but on this only: that he had never lost faith in the great Redeemer who saves to the utmost; and he, Paul, had always loved His

appearance and revelation. Nothing else counted. Every Christian, even the most faithful, terminates his course seeing failure everywhere, and trusting only on the Grace of God.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN—THE MISSIONARY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Our love and esteem is not only for John and Paul, but for all Christ's Apostles and servants. We do not know why we have in the scripture narratives a long and somewhat detailed report of Paul, and very little on some and nothing on others.

Tradition is occupied with all the Apostles and tells of their martyrdom. John was not killed; he lived the longest earthly life among them; and, perhaps, had the longest silent martyrdom. Not a speech of this man is on record. When he is presented in company of Peter, it is the latter who acts as spokesman; John remains silent. We have some Epistles of his, but no report of his sufferings. Only one hint is given in the first chapter of Revelation: "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Aside from this information, we look in vain to discover if he ever was beaten, hungry, sick. Silence faces us everywhere. Even his Epistles do not speak of him, except in a very modest way. He does not call himself "apostle," but simply "elder." There is a

reason: John had to present Jesus as the glorious Son of God; and, in his writings, he hastens to proclaim His majesty, throwing in the shade the various human theories and heresies which already were being fabricated around that matchless Name.

While the book of Acts points out missionary trips in the visible, the book of Revelation presents the mission in the realm of the invisible. John was in spirit on the day of the Lord. While in that condition, he received, for the Church and the churches, the message. The first lesson which the book teaches is in the portrait of the Lord and the servant, by which the Church learns how she must see the Christ and what shall be her attitude towards Him.

The Lord had prophesied that John should remain till Jesus would come. The meaning was that he should meet the Lord in a glorious manifestation. It was for this, that John had to be separated from any active work and relegated to an island as a prisoner: there, should be the meeting place. Let the reader ponder carefully the whole first chapter of Revelation and, with John, hear the voice, as a trumpet, telling him that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. Let the reader see the voice, (mark, "seeing the voice," which, literally speaking, can only be heard); it is a voice carrying reality that seems almost a substance. Let the reader see Jesus in the midst of the candlesticks—the churches. Then, let him look on Jesus Himself, as presented in that chapter. If the reader will keep looking on the details and then embrace the *all* of that countenance, he cannot remain standing anymore; he will, like John, fall as though dead at Jesus' feet; but, like John, will also be touched by the hand of Christ and hear words of assurance and command.

What John wrote is for the Church. Things which were only for himself, like the voices of the seven thunders, he did not write. Consequently, the book of Revelation

is for the Church which has reached that condition, that the Lord of Glory can be fully revealed unto her. The key of the book is in the words, as we noted above, "in the Spirit." The portrait, which must accompany us in the spiritual missionary trip, consists of two persons: the majestic and benevolent Lord; and the servant who has no pretention whatsoever and who falls dead—yes, dead, but in a safe place—at Jesus' feet.

We cannot help remembering the familiar and loving posture of the same servant, many years before, in the evening of the Last Supper, when he, John, was leaning on Jesus' breast. Much time has elapsed since that event. Jesus has become grander and grander; John, smaller and smaller, till they face each other in that desert place, and John cannot do anything else. In a sense he dies; and, if anything should be done, it would come from the resurrection. *Full revelation brings death.* At Jesus' feet, no one remains dead, but enters the new experience—resurrection, which leads to the highest spiritual realm.

John's ministry begins with the letters to the seven churches. They must be read consecutively to have the full picture of the Lord and the various warnings and promises. It is a message in seven portions, needed by all Christians. Too long to detail: let the reader go over and note the various titles of the Lord, set forth according to the various needs; let him also note the various promises and the repetition: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." "Saith"—present tense, for the Spirit keeps "saying," as we keep travelling with John in his missionary, spiritual work.

Only after the full message come the various revelations which cover the whole book. Note some words like these: "After," "I looked," "I saw," "I heard."

After. Everything is in order. Each event or revelation prepares us for the next one.

I saw—I beheld. Not everyone did see but only John; and the Church will see in the measure that she enters in the same spirit. John saw only after he had been prepared; and, after seeing, he centered his attention: he beheld. So the Church will have an enlarged vision; she sees more and more, and fixes a penetrating glance until she "beholds."

I heard. There are many voices around us, but we do not hear them; we need to have the ears opened, in order to learn.

The first thing John saw was a door opened in heaven, while the doors on earth were being closed; and he heard a voice, like a trumpet, saying: "Come up hither and I will show thee things which must be hereafter."

It is the same voice which he had heard in the beginning. John was "in the Spirit" and saw a throne, set in heaven and describes the One who was seated thereon. Continuing to look, he discovered living creatures and elders around the throne and in the midst of the throne. He heard that these creatures and elders are real worshippers and ascribe glory, honor, and power only to the Creator. A lesson to be pondered.

John continues to look, and has the vision of the great problem of the book, sealed with seven seals: a book which no one could take and open. He wept the unselfish weeping of those who are not sorry for themselves anymore, but only when they see some impediment in God's plan.

In the high realm of the Spirit, when the disciple is ready, the teacher is at hand: an elder comforted him and informed that the Lion of the tribe of Judah would take and open the book. He looked and saw, not the Lion, but a Lamb which carried the memorial of the Crucifixion. The Lamb took the book. Adoration and praises followed.

After this another lesson. John saw again, the seven seals which were being opened. Mysteries, secrets are these

seals, which are gradually opened to the Elect. Then, the experience of the seventh chapter which shows an angel of God sealing Christ's servants on their forehead. It is something done by the Lord on the human mind, which becomes "entuned" to the mind of Christ and which shows to those, who have eyes in the forehead, which is to say, even from the first approach to the sealed ones. Great chapter is this! which presents the victorious ones, refined in the furnace of sufferings, and God Himself wiping the tears from their eyes.

At this point an observation: these things, in a spiritual sense, come to pass in the Invisible Church as she reaches the various statures of the book of Revelation.

The opening of the seventh and last seal of the book brings the Elect in a deep, complete silence, lasting half an hour. Then the seven angels, ministries in the Churches, received trumpets for clear and courageous messages. Various events follow the sounding of the four trumpets. A word, however, on this half hour of silence.

Time with God is not measured according to man; hence, we do not know how long is this half hour. Let us remember that Jesus spoke of a complete hour which should mark the time of His return. Here the hour is divided: half is devoted to complete silence.

No one has succeeded by his own efforts to enter a full silence in which, not only the mouth is shut, but all the imagination and thinking faculties are, so to say, suspended. Some mystics have had, now and then, glimpses of such silence; but complete silence is reached by the Elect only after special preparations. We suggest leaving to the reader to consider that this half hour means, that half of our time ought to be spent in a receptive silence.

CHAPTER XVII

TRAVELLING WITH ST. JOHN

Revelation 9-22

There is in the book of Revelation a crescendo of the informations concerning two leaders: Christ and satan. In the Old Testament we know little of both. In the New Testament, Christ was manifested and also satan. The book which says the most about the two is the one which we are now considering. The ninth chapter of Revelation speaks of a "star," fallen from heaven, to whom was given the key of the bottomless pit. Many look for these events to be seen in some distant future. There is a future, but there is also a present. In proportion that the "seals" of the mysterious book are opened, and the angels, ministers, sound their trumpets, demoniac powers are being manifested. Yet, alternate with this hellish manifestation proceeds the revelation of the Lord's omnipotence. A mighty Angel comes, too, from heaven and has in His hand a little book, opened.

Mysteries and the destiny of the Church are in His hand. This mighty Angel is none other than Jesus Himself, and He cries with a loud, majestic voice. To His cry, echo seven thunders, uttering their voices. John is ready to write but is informed that the voices of the seven thunders are a personal message for him. He is, then, com-

manded to take the little book and devour it: it would be bitter in his belly, but sweet as honey in his mouth.

John was entrusted with a larger ministry in these words: "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." On the basis of this new, larger commission, he was given a reed in order to rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and them that worship therein, leaving the court without unmeasured. It is the strict judgment to the Church, to the Body of Christ, for only the Church is composed of real worshippers. At the same time, the Lord gives power to two witnesses who, filled with the Holy Ghost and clothed in sackcloth of humiliation, shall prophesy with great power. Rather than to look for two individuals, let us discover the two witnesses in the complete ministry of John himself, and in all those who have reached or will reach the stature of that part of Revelation. There is a time when no earthly or devilish power can stop the work of the Church. Consequently, John's ministry will be strong and fearless, overcoming every obstacle by the fire—preaching in the Holy Spirit—which goes out of his mouth. Yet, all the prophets have to be, one way or another, killed in the earthly Jerusalem; consequently, these witnesses will be killed; but God will raise them, and voices of victory shall be heard, and the temple of God will be opened: real adoration shall be manifested. To look for all this, in a material sense, would be missing the great message of the book of Revelation.

Following are two great wonders: one, presenting the birth of the man child, which is the formation of the Christ in each member of the Church; and another wonder is the revelation of satan as "dragon," which means arrogance, using and abusing earthly power. He, satan, is portrayed as drawing after him the third part of the stars of heaven, casting them to the earth. Many think of material stars, whereas it is safe to assume that they are "so-called" servants of Christ.

The best in each one's life is soon taken away from him, like the vessels when filled with oil had to be taken away from the presence of the widow. The woman, type of Christians, goes in the wilderness and is protected against the snares of the dragon.

There is war in heaven between Michael and his angels, and the dragon and his angels. The Church is always at war with inimical powers. One of satan's weapons is to sow discord by bringing accusations of the members among themselves. But the Elect have the victory, paying no attention to the accuser by remaining firm in God's love. Having contemplated Jesus for a long time, they learn to suffer in silence; their lives testifying that they really are followers of the Lamb and do not care for their own lives but are ready, even to die for others. The fight with the dragon continues until the Church discovers, that from the sea of humanity and from the nominal religion, rise great usurpers who will deceive all, except those who are really consecrated to Christ. In consequence, the Lamb is seen standing on Mount Zion with His Elect, and the fall of Babylon begins to be announced. "Babylon" is confusion, mixture of religion, and earthly enterprises. Babylon cannot be medicated. There is only one way left to the Church of Christ, and it is to go out of the city of confusion.

Alas! many Christians think that by their staying in the midst of Babylon, they will help the city; whereas, they themselves are in danger of being entangled in the same confusion. The Lord for a time allows people to remain even in Babylon, but not forever.

After leaving Babylon forever, the Elect hear in their spirits a great voice of "Hallelujah." The fall of the city of confusion makes the Elect ready to be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Whatsoever the future, there is *here* and *now* such an event in the realm of the Spirit. Then are seen the Elect, like a great army, moving on white horses, preceded by Jesus who also rides on a white horse.

The memorial of Calvary is, more than before, vivid. Jesus is seen clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and His Name is called the *Word of God*. The robe is identified with the Lord. Word and Blood, sacrifice, are clothing Him. Then, He really becomes King of kings, Lord of lords. The Elect see, in spirit, the end of the opposing powers.

After all that, John saw a new heaven and a new earth and the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven. Still on earth, the Invisible Church is sure of her citizenship above. What a city! What a mystery is the Real Church! A pure river of water of life is now shown, proceeding out of the throne of God and out of the Lamb. The tree of life, multiplied in many trees, brings fruit for each month. There is a power of healing to the nations in the leaves of such a tree. Even the mere presence of a saint, infuses a cheerful and healthy atmosphere.

Reaching such a stature, the servants of the Lord shall serve Him. In the past, there has been some mixture in service, but no more henceforth. They shall see the Lord's face; in this new condition, they shall see no more darkness in the city. Message after message of comfort and encouragement, mingled with warnings to the unfaithful, are poured by the Spirit to and through the Church. Finally, with John, the Church will hear this affirmation and promise: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly [suddenly]."

John and, with him all those who really love the Lord and have followed the revelation up to this point, give a hearty response:

AMEN—Even so, come Lord Jesus.

The two desires meet each other: the Lord and the Bride are one. All this is concluded by a wish that is also a prayer:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

PART
TWO

THE CHRISTIAN VADE MECUM—THE SONG OF SOLOMON

“All things are pure to the pure” (Titus 1:15).

There is no book in the Bible, with the exception of the Apocalypse, in which so much of the ministry of the Invisible Church is presented in her dual relation: to the Lord, first and foremost; and then to the people. The book supposes two others: one in the past, when the Shulamite was working in accord with the “Children of her mother”; and another book which would continue her history, after she has spoken of the “younger sister” and has called on the Lord to come to the mountain of spices.

But such books are not written. Yet, the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Shulamite’s life before she broke relation with the children of her mother, and what became of her after she succeeded in having a following in her younger sister.

The book of Revelation is the next history of the Shulamite—a spiritual history. Let us consider her in the book we have. We do not intend to comment on each portion of the Song of Solomon, but only to single out a few passages which to us seem most adapted to our subject. We desire to discover the ministry of the Shulamite; the complications through which she was forced to move; and her success. May the Lord help us in this, a not easy enterprise.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POWER OF A GREAT HEART

Song of Solomon 1:1-4

The strong entreat, "let Him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," indicates a crisis and a new beginning in the life of the heroine of this book, which goes by the title, "The Song of Solomon" or "The Song of Songs." The woman looks back in her life and sees failure and disappointment; she possessed and still possesses a great ideal to which she came short. Broken by penitence, but refusing to be resigned to defeat, she calls for help on the One to whom she had consecrated her life, and whom—alas!—she had not been serving as she desired. Standing at the borderland, between the past and the future, she has come to understand that only a closer intimacy with the Bridegroom of her heart will save her from future failings. She knows that no one can become brave and be an overcomer by listening to negatives, but only by having a great *positive*. She desires that her only salvation will be in being drawn closer and closer to her Lord.

So far, the Shulamite has experienced only favors from Him. Great and helpful as they have been, she failed to entirely profit by them, and she has come to discover, in herself, a kind of double life. Yet, she is a woman of des-

tiny: the urge of the election lays heavy on her, and she has, at last, to make a decision. Having lost any hope in her will power, she knows now that her only refuge is in becoming entirely absorbed in the love of her Lord. No mere favors does she ask; her pleading is: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." Of course, this is an earthly figure, but we have no other way of expounding some mysteries than by earthly comparisons, clothed in earthly language.

Christ's love, when really understood and possessed, creates martyrs. There are many kinds of martyrdom, especially for those who have an intense soul. A deep love, when fully reciprocated, acts like a protection against the various allurements of evil. Mind and heart abhor vacuum; but, when the Lord fills the mind and possesses the heart, the Christian has not even the time and willingness to pay attention to other objects. The lives of many saints demonstrate the truth of these affirmations. Indeed, there is a great power in a great love.

The Shulamite, more as if speaking to herself than to her Beloved, continues: "For thy love is better than wine." In this affection she finds more than all the blessings and comforts she might receive. She desires Him above gifts and blessings. The Lord knows our desires, yet devoted souls like to speak to Him, for we really fortify ourselves, gaining faith and firmness by hearing our own words of praise and consecration.

"Because of the savor of thy good ointments thy name is an ointment poureth forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." The Shulamite does not dare to say that she loves Him, for a real lover never praises his own love. Others, in her estimation, more worthy than she—others, indeed, love Him, and she calls them virgins, meaning innocent ones. How often deep saints have looked back to the time of their innocence, thinking that only then could they love

and serve the Lord better. They have yet to know God's heart and providence by which His Redemption can bring us to a better state than that of the innocent. Someone translates part of the quotation thus: "For, better are thy caresses than wine: like the fragrance of thy precious oils, oil poured out is thy name" (Rotherham).

"Name" stands for everything in the Lord's Person and Life. The mere mentioning, if done by the Spirit, of His Name opens a fountain of fragrance and love.

The Shulamite is not satisfied, and pleads for something else. She desires to become a prisoner of the Lord. Distrusting her own ability and constancy to follow, she prays: "Draw me." As to say: "In this moment, I am fully determined. Knowing my past and my weaknesses, I do not promise—though I would—that I will follow. Wilt Thou Thyself take on Thee also the burden of my coming to Thee? Imprison me and draw me, Thou Thyself."

It is true that the Lord draws people "with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4); but the Shulamite asks more than that. If we detect, by the words, her meaning, she means this: "Take Thou my hand and draw me after Thee."

We remember at this point what an Apostle prophesies of the Church. "And hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). (Someone translates: "The Son of His Love.") It is more than guidance. It is as though a giant would enwrap a child in his arms and rescue him from a dangerous place; and sets him where he cannot fall anymore, for it is an enclosed place where the only law is Jesus' love.

After such an insistent prayer, the Shulamite makes a promise; it is the first one she is confident to make: "We will run after thee." Rotherham uses the same words, inverting their order, by which a great meaning is suggested: "After thee, we will run."

Oh! the past, when she, the tried Shulamite, had been running here and there, with a good intention of course, but exchanging often, creeds, theories, feasts, and people for the Lord Himself. It is a decision now—"after thee," and not after anyone else. Why does she ask the favor in the singular and makes the promise in the plural? Is the Shulamite really alone; has she no friends; no sympathizers with her ideals? We will see in the next chapter. Meanwhile, let us read what happened:

"The king hath brought me into his chambers." Again she promises in the plural: "We will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee." The marginal note has: "They love thee uprightly." Rather obscure meaning, or inadequate speech, which means, that it is more than just, to love such a king.

The Lord answers not by words, but by introducing her chamber after chamber in the secret of His life. The Shulamite has yet to travel much more in the palace of the King and has much more to discover. In her first enthusiasm, she speaks also in the name of others who are not present, but who will hear from her. And again: who are these others? Of this, by God's Grace, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

Song of Solomon 1:5-6

There is in any congregation of Christians a variety of groups. Some are "tares"; some are the "children of the mother"; others are the "daughters of Jerusalem"; and a few—oh! how few—resemble the Shulamite. The daughters of Jerusalem are never persecutors; they are gentle people, but not strong enough, nor enlightened to take a determined stand for the Lord. They lament, almost in plaintive tones, the abuses of some false or arrogant shepherds; yet they suffer in silence. They recognize the worthiest elements—the Shulamite—and note that they are not fully appreciated. Now and then, the daughters of Jerusalem make some remarks about evil, but are not strong enough to frighten the evildoers: they give some encouragement to the Shulamite, but not clearly, nor hold enough as to make others see that they are ready to take a determined stand for the Lord and for the Truth. They are not sectarians, nor dominated by a "churchism" spirit; neither are they decided to face opposition, ready to lose all for all. They oscillate like a pendulum, saying that things should be adjusted; another time, recommending that the unity of

the Church should not be disturbed. Dear souls are they, but they for a long time exchange the visible congregation for the real Body of Christ.

The keen Shulamite has discovered the good in these gentle souls; and, now that she has taken her stand for the Lord, she is confident that the daughters of Jerusalem, also, will some day gather courage and desire only Christ. Consequently, in her devotions and promises to the Lord, this martyr includes and makes promises for the daughters of Jerusalem.

The Shulamite has gone through fire and ordeal. Only Christ could say that He had no sin; only He, before the last encounter with the enemy could say: "The prince of this world cometh but he has nothing in me." The Shulamite could not say, that she was perfect, that she carried no scars out of past mistakes. She knows that even in the most noble fights, even those who are in the right miss something. Consequently, she wished to assure the daughters of Jerusalem that they should not stumble at something they might discover in her. The Shulamite confesses that, according to appearances, they might stumble; but that, if they look deeper to the causes and to the reality, they would not remain scandalized but, someday, would follow her footsteps. Full of confidence, she comes out from the private interview with the Lord and speaks to the dear souls:

"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." The hospitality of the Arabs is well known. The ferocious Bedouins, the terrors of the desert embrace, without inquiry or hesitation, the stranger who dares to confide in their honor and to enter their tent. Practically, the Shulamite meant this: "Yes, I am black; but just as I am, I am a tent of refuge to those who confide in me; and, though not of any worth in myself, I know how

to be a curtain, to adorn others even in the palace of the magnificent Solomon. Call me as you please; but do not forget that God has made me 'tents' and 'curtains'—shelter and adornings."

There is an ugliness which is only apparent; and also a beauty, not seen at first glance. "Black" is a hard word and may refer to much more than we imagine. The lives of the most saintly individuals are not immuned from some report which stains their reputation. Perhaps, they themselves have given occasion, at least in part, to these reports. Yet, God alone knows the circumstances and the inner tragedies. Untoward incidents come unexpected in the noblest enterprises. Enemies profit of what is evil and report to annihilate the good; but the daughters of Jerusalem are of a forbearing spirit. They may, for a time, remain perplexed, but do not rejoice in evil and are ready, on explanation, to see the bright side of things. Some kind of confession and teaching the Shulamite feels she owes them, and anticipates the effect of their own impression, or possible accusations of the enemies. "Yes, it is true," she says, "I am black. In my own eyes, I am black; yet, I know that the Lord loves me. There are many things which you do not know; I am comely, too. Look at the tents of Kedar, look at the curtains of the great king Solomon, though of many colors are useful nevertheless."

Deep in her spirit, the Shulamite must have thought of herself, that as a tent she could welcome and take in weary pilgrims of the wilderness, and could be like a curtain even in the palace of the great king. She points to an inner beauty which is not easily detected. There are various kinds of beauty; but of this later.

The Shulamite kept speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem whom, in a sense, she had adopted as her spiritual children, and kept talking: "Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me."

There is a time when a Christian has to say to others: "Look on me, imitate me." But this can be recommended only on rare occasions, when we are entirely, not only in God's will, in general, but also in His will in every detail. Also, it is safe to exhort people to imitate us in being steady in having one goal, serving Christ. Let others imitate us in this, but let them not examine, too strictly, the complexities of life, for we are still human beings, subject to like passions as others.

The Shulamite exhorted the daughters of Jerusalem, not to pay attention to her blackness—mind you, that she called herself black, not others. Her excuse was that the sun had looked upon her. Strange as this excuse may seem to those who know little of spiritual conflicts, it is a valid argument to those who have begun to discover what faces show and keep showing with the *sun* of righteousness. It was when the sun rose upon him, that Jacob, who had just been made Israel, began to halt upon his thigh. Like some matters, which on touching others, create some chemical results, so at the touch of the Lord, Christians begin to show blackness. It was all "in" before, but was not discovered. We are reminded of the Psalm on the knowledge of God (Psalm 139), in which, among other things, we read: "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in the book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." It means, God knew all our most secret iniquities and imperfections before we could imagine even the existence of each one of them. But the sun gave us the discovery of ourselves. When the Samaritan woman accepted the words of Jesus, that He is the Christ, then, and not before, she saw the "whole" of herself. Let us repeat that she had not given in, when Jesus told her about the

husbands, but that she was, so to say, annihilated in all her reasonings when she heard the great I AM.

The discovery of herself and even the rising of some strange incident in the Shulamite did not discourage her; rather, it engendered in her a great confidence in her Lord.

“Black I am, I see that; others may know, or see in me unpleasant things. I do not deny it. All this exposure of the dark side of my inner life is a consequence of a great Grace: ‘The sun has looked [an intense looking which calls things to the surface], the sun has looked upon me.’ ”

CHAPTER XX

THE CHILDREN OF MY MOTHER

The Shulamite continues her testimony and enters the relation of a sad experience. "My mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

The noble woman gave a deep sigh and sank into silence. Her message to the others was over for the time; she had reached the climax of her crisis; she was ready for a new start. Her words are deep and far-reaching, deserving consideration and meditation.

"My mother's children." She does not call them, not even brethren. Who are they? Evidently, they are not the children of the Shulamite's father, but only of the mother, begotten from another man. The mother, of course, can be none other than the visible church. She—the visible church in her ambition to proselyte and to become important—began to be eager about numbers and spreading human influence. Under fair pretenses of adaptation, she began to compromise with the world, seeking and accepting its protection. We remember satan's temptation to Jesus when he showed Him the kingdoms of this world, promising that he, satan, would give them to Jesus, if He only would pay homage to him. We also remember Jesus' an-

swer. The visible church, in her majority, has not given such an answer, but, allured by a fair mirage, has fallen in a trap. By gaining in number and earthly importance, she has been losing in faithfulness and in power. Of course, in the visible church, is hidden the Invisible One, which is composed by the Shulamite and her spiritual children. These have never enjoyed the mother's compromises, although, for a time, all have been caught in the same hurricane.

These children are the bastards in the church; they are astute and intriguing. Possessing some earthly abilities, they want to use them in church advancement. They become the great organizers and ecclesiastical statesmen, discovering who is and who are the ones who may be used to advance their schemes. It is not necessary to think only of individuals, but it is important to detect the spirits which, under a religious appearance, desire to, more and more, make the church a wordly institution.

These bastards have discovered the ability and influence of the Shulamite and have succeeded in pushing her to the front. It seems we hear these church magnates speaking to the Shulamite: "You are a spiritual person; the people like you; you attract crowds; you are a good speaker; we need you; etc." And because ignorance of the real issues of life is, for a time, even in the most candid people, and because some vanity afflicts even the saintliest persons, the Shulamite accepted, to be made the keeper of the vineyard. Yet, there remained, deep in her spirit, a certain undefinable something which made her uneasy in the presence of the enthusiastic encouragers. She detected in their voices and demeanor something which seemed strange, but she paid no attention, thinking that those impressions were wrong and were caused by jealousy or unappreciation. But time is a great physician.

Now in one of her "so-called" friends, now in another, she began to discover earthly ambitions. She also noticed

that the group of her "would be protectors" were not really united among themselves: each one, secretly envying or hating the others, was trying to use her as a tool, in order that each one of them might *de facto* become the real leader behind her influence, and she would be kept as a figurehead.

God who had elected the Shulamite never abandoned her. His Spirit kept working and teaching continuously, until she realized, at last, that those vague impressions about the important people of the past were really advisers of the Spirit. She discovered, finally, that she had fallen in strange hands, because she herself was not really humble and had harbored some iniquity of preeminence. Who knows if she had felt herself to be a great leader around whom many followers would cloister. Lives of Christian workers, describing in blazing colors how much they accomplished, what mighty people of prayer they were, are abundant. The extension of the work, the running here and there had been always emphasized. The Shulamite, swollen in heart, had begun to think of herself as a real big leader whose name one day would be immortal in the history of the Church.

Grace kept pounding on these dreams, until they were reduced to ashes. The Shulamite discovered jealousy among missions; that the real conversions are rare; and that under religious pretense many seek their own, not what is of Christ. She also discovered that some simple, honest people suffer in the churches; that they are tired of empty speeches and pompous services; that the churches preach ecclesiasticism and use Christ's Name only as a means to their end. (There are exceptions, of course.) The Shulamite discovered also that there are people who, though remaining near the mass of religionists, deep in their spirits sigh for pure Christian religion.

Disgusted, the Shulamite was ready to abandon any hope of ever being able and willing to serve the Lord. But

the Lord, by one of His strokes of providence, forced her to cut from the past and make a new beginning. At first, occasionally; finally, in a clear cut way, she declared her position and that she could no longer be considered a leader, much less, *the* leader. The bastard children showed their colors and began persecuting her, branding her as a "backslider" and "betrayer." The history of the persecution will be known only in heaven. We are human, only "dry sticks," and something on which aspersions might be framed is not impossible to find. The Shulamite desired to remain firm and would no longer yield to compromises. She said to herself: "Why do I seem so important to others? My real spiritual life is becoming, more and more, dry. I am growing in ecclesiasticism but losing in real Christianity. It is enough!"

No one can really preach to others if he is not himself filled with God's Grace. The words and works of a real Christian may be few, but they will have a lasting effect; for whatever God does is eternal.

At this point, we recollect what we read in a certain fictitious book, about the meeting of two clergymen. One was poor and despised; the other had become influential. The latter remarked to the former, something like this, (I quote from memory):

"My dear friend, you made a great mistake; you should have preached the church, and now and then, mentioned Christ. But you preached Christ and neglected the church. Here you are misunderstood and persecuted."

The Shulamite closed her testimony and meant to say: "It is time now that I really begin to seek the Lord, Him first; and, if He has any command for me, He knows where I am. To Him, primarily, my service must be given.

CHAPTER XXI

PLEADING WITH THE LORD—"TELL ME"

Song of Solomon 1:7-8

To make a decision is one thing, but to remain calm is something different. Great temptations assailed the sensitive Shulamite. The daughters of Jerusalem, though honest people, were not yet with her, and the various groups looked on her as a stranger, or worse, as a failure. In the meantime, reports of blessings were trumpeted right and left. A certain darkness and anguish of spirit began to creep on the Shulamite. One thing remained firm in her: she was sure of her election; and, though she had become in her own conceit "black," she deeply trusted in the Lord's faithfulness and mercy. In her distress, she drew closer to Him and pleaded:

"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.' Tell me. I am confused in depending on mere revelations, for I do not know if I may be deceived. Lord, let me clearly hear. I hate self-deception. I want to hear thee only, for I cannot appeal to anyone else for guidance. Thou art the One whom my soul loveth. I am confused. Where is thy Church? where is the right Word given? where is real Rest

in this difficult hour — noon — when under the scorching sun, rest is most needed?"

The Shulamite gave the reason of the pleading, for she felt she was alone, and remembered the tauntings of those who criticized, saying: "Thou separateth thyself, because thou are not right and seekest thy own convenience and have thy own plans, etc." Continuous tauntings, coupled with trials and temptations, and—alas!—with some failures, break the hearts even of the strongest ones. The Shulamite continued:

"Why should I be as one turned aside by the flocks of thy companions?" (The marginal note has, "As one that is veiled.") "Should I, alone, remain in this condition of solitude, devouring my own heart and hearing accusations as I were a backslider, and one who separates herself from the Body of believers?"

But the Lord has prepared the Shulamite for a real new beginning. The ashes, the spirit of heaviness, and the mourning have been for a purpose. God takes a long time to train His servants, who not only have to testify to a new people, but who have to become builders of wastes and desolations, repairers of ruins of many generations—the consequence of many causes. The Lord answers her: "If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents."

It is, indeed, a new beginning. The Shulamite discovers that she did not understand God's plans and ways. While she calls herself "black," the Lord qualifies her as the "fairest among women," possessed of that inner beauty which is so precious in God's sight and is discovered only by those who have anointed eyes.

"Go thy way; do not try to destroy your make-up. Do not try to be someone else. Act as your personality makes you act. Do not stumble at the many reports about religious works. Do not abandon the poor flocks, although

thou art not part of them. Do not mingle with them, but in thy spirit and prayers and whenever the occasion offers thee, go by the footsteps of the flock. There, thou wilt find, just near the tents of the shepherds—not in the tents, for they are not accepted; not far, for they are still seeking the Lord—thou shalt discover some kids which I entrust to thee; and they, to thee, have been destined. People who are styled not sheep but *kids*, outcasts, they belong to Me. The shepherds do not know that. These 'so-called' kids need a special ministry. It is only an outcast who can have compassion on outcasts. Go thy way, in thy methods, discover these hungry ones who are almost dying and feed, thou, them."

We remember at this point, the man who was blind, to whom Jesus had given sight; and who was excommunicated. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and He—the great Excommunicated from the official religious circles of those days—went to seek him. The lone Lord found the lone outcast, and revealed Himself to him as the Son of God.

"Feed thy kids. Look for them, roaming near religious groups. Be on the search, do not persecute anyone, nor judge." The new ministry, the real ministry of the Shulamite had been pointed out. She entered her new beginning.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TRAINING AND WORK OF THE SHULAMITE

Song of Solomon 1:12; 2:2-7

Faithful service depends on the power of pure love; and this, in turn, depends mostly on the clear "knowing." This said Jesus is eternal life, to know God the Father and His Son whom He sent to seek, save, and make. God is creator first, and then He makes.

As soon as the Shulamite had received her commission, she heard, from the mouth of the Bridegroom, words of praise and encouragement. She needed to get her eyes away from herself, in the sense, of not having too much introspection, which, in sensitive and deeply religious people, might lead to despair. This, indeed, is the danger of those who, like the Shulamite, have separated from the children of the mother and have entered the realm of the Invisible.

After being encouraged as to who she really was in the sight of the Bridegroom and how beautiful she was (read chapter 1:9-11), the Shulamite begins her service.

In the realm of the Spirit, far above church's activities, the first service is to the Lord Himself, beginning often in a silent adoration and contemplation. The Shulamite gives her testimony in the words: "While the king sitteth at his

table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." The costly perfume was there, but inactive until the king took his place: then only did the perfume fill the house. We are reminded of what happened when Jesus was invited to a feast in a certain house where Mary of Bethany broke the alabaster box and poured its contents on Jesus: the house was filled with the aroma; all the guests were there, but no perfume was smelled, for the box had not been broken. Only when the proper time came and the alabaster box was broken was the good fragrance felt.

The Shulamite had learned that, before she could do any real service for the king, she had to wait that He Himself, in his proper time and by his pleasure, should come and sit by the table. Only then would the heart be open and from grateful lips would flow volumes of praises.

She continues to testify, speaking of what the Lord is to her and what she wants to be to Him. She desires to be like the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys. Her two figures of modesty and sufferings are, in the valley of humiliation, away from eyes of curiosity and surrounded by thorns. She then compares the Bridegroom to an apple tree under which she sits, refreshing herself with His shadow. While in this place of rest and communion, she could relish the fruit of the Spirit. At this spiritual banquet, the Lord displayed on her, His banner—Love.

The grand lesson is the Love of God, which is the cause and sustaining force of everything. It takes time to begin to realize that God's essence is Love. Christians often repeat, "Love of God," but do not enter soon into its realization. God wants to perfect His saints by covering them with His Love, for only then can they properly speak of Him.

The Shulamite, under that Love which melts the heart and almost makes one faint, asked to be sustained in this new experience; and then she felt the left hand—affection,

and the right hand—power—take hold of her in an embrace. The two forces, love and power, balance each other and make a Christian mature. No love alone; no power alone—both are needed.

It is not out of place to note that these two hands, affection and omnipotence, are the two infallible forces by which the soul of the Shulamite—and by this name we mean the real Church of Christ,—is anchored to the throne of God.

At this point, the Shulamite begins to exhort and teach the people who, by this time, have begun to follow her. She had been drawn to the Lord, and some, following her, were running after Him. But running has also its dangers; and, with immature Christians, a certain restlessness remains a long time. The lesson is needed, that we must enter into Rest, and that the king himself will not make his abode and Rest in agitated spirits. The Church is destined to be the House of God; in the House must be an atmosphere of peace and calm. We remember the building of the temple of Solomon. The stones were hewed and transported from a distance; but, in their setting, there was no noise of hammers or other tools.

The Shulamite turned to her followers and entreated them: "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field [timid animals], that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please."

Oh! the noise and agitation of some well-intentioned but infantile Christians. Rest we need and we find it only in God. In this world where Jesus has come and found no reception, He rests only in some house of peace. We remember Jesus' stormy days in Jerusalem, and that He retired for the nights on the Mount of Olives for rest, or, at times, He went to Bethany.

The Church's desire is Rest—Eternal Rest. God's desire is to abide in clean, loving hearts where He, too, may Rest.

CHAPTER XXIII

FROM CONTEMPLATION TO INTENSE, DILIGENT WORK

Song of Solomon 2:8-17

"The voice of my beloved," so the Shulamite exclaims. Others had not heard Him, for they were too occupied with other sounds. But the Shulamite distinguished that voice in the midst of rumors and noises, because her heart had been long "entuned" to its vibrations. She calls the attention of others and, by the voice, she learns the movements of her Beloved.

"Behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." Many times Christians stop their progress, losing time with mountains and hills which often have to be skipped and left behind. The Shulamite looks on her Beloved and discovers Him: "Behold, He standeth behind our wall, He looketh forth at the windows, shewing Himself through the lattice."

Even the best Christians are, for a long time, set and imprisoned in some crystallized creed. It is their's, not God's wall. A wall is an enclosure of protection and man is ready to fabricate for himself some kind of fortress. The Lord never forces anything, but comes and stands behind the wall

of many Christians. Happily, there are some windows by which some light still comes in; there is also a lattice. The Lord, following as He is wont—the line of least resistance—shows Himself through these ways of approach, and speaks.

“My Beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

Abraham was never settled long in one place, for in that land of valleys and heights, he had to move continuously. He had no palaces, and his life could be portrayed in two symbols: *tent* and *altar*, pilgrimage and adoration.

At each new beginning there is a loving entreating, “My love, my fair one, come away.” Before any departure there is always a “come.” The life of a Christian is under three imperative: *Come—Abide—Go*. These commands are interchangeable.

The Lord describes to the Shulamite new conditions which call for new methods: “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land.”

Some would always remain in the “shouts” of the first experiences. Changes to them seem like backsliding; consequently, they are apt to manufacture some artificial “fire” and feign some kind of “rain.” But the real Church knows that there are seasons when there is no rain, and only waiting and trusting are possible (Isaiah 50:10). Not much singing, nor very musical singing is heard but only the plaintive notes of the turtle dove, a bird of love, which has not a pompous appearance. New conditions around the Shulamite are called to her attention: “The fig tree puteth forth her green figs, and the vines give a good smell.” It is a time of restoration, which begins in a quiet way. The

invitation is repeated: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

At this point, we perceive what is not visible at first, that the Shulamite, having gone through some periods of despondency, has retired somewhat into solitude. She began to be displeased with her own countenance and disturbed by her own voice. She had seen so much of the Lord's beauty and had heard the sweet music of His voice—perhaps even unfavorably comparing herself to others, as some sensitive Christians do—that she felt that the Lord should use better workers. At this point, the Bridegroom seeks and comforts her with one of the best entreatings which might be read anywhere.

"O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely."

A description of the Bride's character is in these words. She is a "dove," which word implies faithful love and modesty. She spends her time in the wounds of her Lord, not only meditating Calvary, but penetrating, so to say, each item of that tragedy. She is in the secret places of the stairs by which the soul ascends, rung after rung, to the heights of contemplation and communion. All is beautiful, but the Bride should not remain too hidden, too silent. The Lord's countenance and voice must be demonstrated to others; a medium is needed: the Shulamite is the proper representative. Do not judge thine own countenance and voice. It is not what you think of them that counts, but what beauty the Lord will put on thee and power in thy voice which is important. Rather, the more we hate and forget ourselves, the more beautiful and efficient we become in God's realm.

A new delicate work awaits the Shulamite: "Take us, the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes." A work of inner searching and dig-

ging begins in the Church. Spiritual scenes are not easily discovered; and many astutenesses, covered under the cloak of zeal, are not noticed. Gossip, judgments are the faults of many, and they tend to destroy tender souls. Sincerity and simplicity should be the aim of every Christian; consequently, a diligent work is needed. Foxes, ruining big things; little foxes, hiding among the leaves, are the ruin of many assemblies. Capture them, after they have been discovered, and save the vines, the tender vines. The Shulamite understands and obeys, and enters a deeper relation with the Bridegroom. She exclaims: "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." An interchange of possessions, by which the Lord becomes ours in proportion as we become His. Then, she continues, affirming that she understands the heart of the Bridegroom, which heart, too, needs to be fed. She exclaims: "He feedeth among the lilies."

"Blessed are the pure in heart [the lilies] for they shall see God." Blessed are those who love to remain unknown. The Shulamite fears that she may again go through seasons of trials. She pleads with the Lord that He may not stay away from her by remaining on some mount of separation. She pleads:

"Until the daybreak and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, [keep turning], and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel."

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM THE WILDERNESS—WITNESSING TO THE DAUGHTERS OF ZION

Song of Solomon 3:1-11

One of the saddest experiences of Christians is to remain, for a time, without the sensible presence of the Lord, as is prophesied by Isaiah (45:15) in the words: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

The Shulamite had to pass from an experience to a deeper one. Yet, the trial of faith disguises itself, for, if the Christian should know that it is a trial of faith, he would not be tempted. It seems that the Lord has abandoned the elect one; and he blames himself as the cause of such experience. The Shulamite testifies: "By night . . . I sought him whom my soul loveth . . . but I found him not." Again, she doubted that she was in God's order and was tempted to seek him where the crowd of people were. She said to herself: "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth."

In vain! the crowd did not give back her Beloved. She had to confess: "I sought him, but I found him not." She had to enter in a new experience, after she had appealed in

vain to the leaders of the visible church. "The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" No answer; no light did she receive from man. The silence speaks that those watchmen, wise in their own conceit, treated her as absent minded, or worse. She was no part of the city, and she had not found the Lord but was treated as a poor mad woman to whom no attention was paid.

Yet, the Lord did not keep her much longer in the vain search, and the Shulamite informs us: "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth." She had to go beyond the watchmen, beyond religionists, in order to find her Lord again. And then, so the Shulamite remarks: "I held him, and would not let him go, until I brought him into my mothers' house, and into the chamber of her that conceiveth me."

Mysterious words are these which hint that she was tired of enjoying her mystical experiences alone, and was desirous to have someone entering the depths of her communion. And then, again, she charged the candid, but not yet restful companions in the words she had said to them before, that she might not be restless: "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem . . . that ye stir not nor awake my love, till he please." Only after this repeated information to the daughters of Jerusalem did the Shulamite begin to really grow in the eyes of her followers, who by now are gathering courage and begin to speak of her with no uncertain sound. They speak first among themselves; and, then, in a way to be heard even by others: "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?" (Rotherham has: "Besides all the aromatic powder of the merchant.")

The Shulamite is seen now, more and more, as a leader, under, of course, the guidance of the great Leader. She

emerges out of a solitude, which seemed to some like a separation; and to others like backsliding: she seems as "pillars of smoke." We remember that God led His people in the wilderness by a pillar—cloud—by day, and a pillar of fire by night. The pillar of the Shulamite is seen as of smoke, at first, because the Lord is pleased to hide himself. Indeed, cloud and thick darkness are about Him (Psalm 97). But this pillar which seemed to multiply itself in pillars had a special fragrance, not only of the most costly myrrh and frankincense—types of crucifixion and adoration—but also of all the other perfumes which could be imagined.

A description follows which extends to some provision being made also for them: "Pillars of silver [redemption], the bottom thereof of gold [faith and consecration], the covering of it of purple [sacrifice], the midst thereof being paved with love [charity being the basis of all real religion], for the daughters of Jerusalem." It is significant that the same preposition "for" is by someone translated "from," by which we see that love is the cause of the daughters' of Jerusalem growing, and it is the basis of their future service and adoration.

Only now can these new followers hear a deeper message by which they are encouraged to see the king in His glory. In the mystical vocabulary, "glory" is linked with the cross and issues from it. Before we see Jesus crowned with many diamonds, we have to contemplate Him in His passion, covered with a purple rag, which, in mockery, has been called a robe, and having on His head a crown of thorns.

"Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart."

Is, indeed, this Solomon, the son of David? Was he ever crowned by his mother? Did mothers crown kings?

Why is this king presented under the name of Solomon? Serious questions are these which call for a frank answer, to discover if this is a mystical book or merely an earthly poem.

Solomon, as the name implies, was a type of the king of peace, but peace comes by suffering, for one has to pay its price. We cannot deny that Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, did influence David so that Solomon might have the kingdom, but she was not the one who anointed and crowned her son. Moreover, Solomon was not crowned in the day of his espousals but long before then. "Espousals" mean consecration to the future family. Jesus was consecrated as a Saviour before His incarnation. The mother who crowned this king was not only the prophecy of the aged Simeon, who announced to the Virgin that her son should be contradicted, spoken against, but that also a sword should pierce her soul. "Mother" in the scripture has various meanings, and stands for the most affectionate being that one may have. Yet, as the prophet informs (Isaiah 49:15), even mothers fail at times. It was a crown which the Lord received at the hand of His most loved ones. The gladness of Jesus' heart points out the joy He had in His sufferings, for by it He prepared the good of others. Let us keep in mind that Jesus called Himself the "Son of Man" and showed partiality to no one. He accepted His duties as a *son* of all humanity. His mother—humanity—crowned Him with a crown of thorns. Redeemed humanity will someday feast, seeing Him crowned in glory with many diamonds.

Note here that this group of followers is addressed by a new name: "O, ye daughters of Zion." Zion is the fortress of David, a protection to the city, and is a symbol of the Bride of the Lamb which, in turn, has to be a fortress, a place of refuge in Jerusalem.

The Invisible Church—Zion—must not despise the visible church. Though misunderstood by almost all and hated by some, the Invisible Church must stand like a fortress, where all those who are disappointed in Jerusalem may someday run for shelter and consolation. Zion herself must remember that, for a time, she has been under the influence or dictation of the children of the mother; and, for another length of time, she has been timid and wavering as all the daughters of Jerusalem have been, before entering the deeper schoolroom of the daughters of Zion.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOURS OF THE NIGHT—THE MATURING OF THE FRUIT

Song of Solomon 4:6-16

Then, again, the Shulamite, after the consolations, finds herself in a continuous danger and feels a need of a closer communion with the Lord. The pilgrimage of Christians is not easy, and often needs a retreat in the Lord in order to regain power and perseverance to abide faithful. The Shulamite makes a decision, recorded in these words: "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense."

It is not only night, but with something which cannot be described and which the scriptures call "shadows." The language hints some apparitions which make the night more dreadful, though already dark by itself. When the Lord afflicted the Egyptians on account of Israel's not being freed to go, there came on the land an unusual darkness which was like a thick cloud of smoke, almost suffocating. Strange as it may seem, to increase the horror of night, there are some fantasms, scarcely visible, hence more frightening. Of course, all this should be mainly considered in a spiritual sense. No power in the Shulamite or in anyone else to fight darkness and shadows. Flight only remains;

but where? Of course, she had already begun to enjoy the fellowship of some; but, in this case, she needed a deeper solitude and not the presence of people. The Shulamite decides to get herself to two special places, which she calls, "the mount of myrrh and the hill of frankincense."

It is not difficult to see what these two places symbolize: one is Calvary; the other is a place of worship and adoration. We might call this second place "Mount Olivet." Calvary, in figure, stands higher, to teach that the deeper the fellowship in Jesus' sufferings, the easier will be the path to adoration. It is like a gentle slope from a mountain to a hill: the first indicating arduous climbing; the second suggesting calm repose. The Shulamite will not remain always in one place, but alternate her visits. When she will be, so to say, satiated on Calvary, she will need a diversion, not as the world would give it, but as the Lord Himself has provided. The life of a real Christian must be balanced between deep contrition and joyful praise. Something of this kind of experience is suggested in James' Epistle, where the remedy is prepared for affliction and for joy. But to return:

The Shulamite will get strength to go ahead. Being encouraged by her Beloved, she hears again His voice of comfort. "Thou are fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." It is surprising to note the Lord's patience and delicate attention in repeating His words of appreciation and encouragement. Till we are in this body, we are exposed to frequent depressions.

The Bridegroom continues: "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." It is not in our purpose to go into the details of the book. We only suggest that each of these heights represents a place of overcoming, where we see difficulties, not above us, but

under our feet: a place where dangers and enemies become, in God's providence, friends and auxiliaries. Things assume a different shape, according from the place we look at them.

They, the repeated praises by the Bridegroom, reveal how she has reached such a poverty in spirit, that she does not see anything worthy in herself. Among the various praises, the Lord addresses her in these words: "A garden enclosed [barred] is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." All these descriptions speak of retirement and conditions worked out by providence, by which the Shulamite has become a prisoner of her Lord.

"Garden!" Yes, but not opened to everyone.

"Spring!" Indeed, but appearing dry, unless opened.

"Fountain!" But there is a seal to the door by which it is reached.

There are souls who have volumes of revelations; and, yet, have, so to say, lost the power of speech. They can open their mouths only when and how the Lord commands.

Descriptions in details are given of the inside of the garden, where not even the Shulamite is able to look. It is true that there are in human hearts evils of which one is not conscious; but it is also true that, by the grace of God, there bloom virtues of which we often are not aware. The Lord describes us to ourselves, according to our need. This method accords with the word of James, that when we are rich we should rejoice in our poverty; and when poor, rejoice in our richness. The Lord knows how to humble us when we are tempted to vanity and pride; but He also is ready to encourage us when we are depressed. He continues: "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron . . . with all the chief spices." A combination of fruits and perfumes. Among the various fruits, pome-

granates are mentioned which are one of the representatives of the Church, suggesting a closed unity under one enclosure.

The Bride lives for others. This is God's plan: that when we have drunk of Him, out of our systems shall flow rivers of living water. In the language of the Bridegroom, the Shulamite is still described: "A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." This, of course, is her service to others who follow in her footsteps and also become gardens and streams of waters which reach even the wilderness. The Bride is aware that, adjacent to the most lofty summits, are the deepest precipices; that it is dangerous to remain long in ecstasies, much more, to be occupied with our own gifts and talents. She has learned by now that her safety consists in calling on the Lord for protection. It seems that she addresses the elements, but, practically, her prayer is to the Lord. She pleads:

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Hard prayer is this from the lips of one who has entered the Lord's beatitudes; but a very wise prayer. Our enthusiasms need often to be corrected by some "cold" wind of human indifference, or worse. Our healthy condition needs also to experience some days when the sultry and oppressing south winds causes in us fainting spells. It is by the alternation of these two winds that the spices acquire their fragrance and flow in abundance.

Another danger.

We remember the poor widow who was commanded by the prophet to pour oil from her small cruise into the empty vessels her boys were presenting to her. But the prophet had also commanded, that as soon as they were filled with the costly liquid, they should be taken away from the woman's eyes into another room. The lesson is, that

the widow should never see herself too rich, in order that she should stop desiring more. Oil in abundance, but always to be poured into an empty vessel. Such is the life of real Christians.

The Shulamite felt the danger and pleaded: "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." No fruits to be eaten by herself, but by the Lord, and, through Him, by whomsoever He would grace. As for the Shulamite, she should always remain as one who has nothing in which to boast. Rich for others, but always poor herself. It is so. We cannot safely see ourselves either in misery, which borders on despair; nor in richness, which engenders pride. By God's grace, a state is provided, by which we remain always free from anguishes and elations: empty but content and always ready to receive more.

CHAPTER XXVI

BALANCED FOOD—INTERRUPTED ECSTASIES— SUFFERINGS—OTHER FOLLOWERS

Song of Solomon 5:1-9

We cannot read with profit the Song of Solomon, nor any other book of the Bible, if we use human logic. By the Fall, man has gone so much astray from the simplicity which is in God, that to a mind which is not fully trained in the realm of the Spirit, the things of God and the mode of their presentation seem unreasonable, at times, even childish. The Lord knows from how many complexities we must be freed: this is the reason for so many seemingly useless repetitions and admonitions, following the greatest blessings and words of encouragement.

The fifth chapter of the book introduces us again to the garden. After the experiences of the two opposite winds, the Lord visits the garden. He begins by calling the Shulamite with two of the sweetest words in the human language: "sister," "spouse." There are other tender expressions in the book, but these two words refer to the familiarity and unbashfulness which occurs among those who are born in the same family; and the other title, to the ideal of a close intimacy which ends in perfect union. Union and communion are seen in the Song of Solomon.

The Shulamite had asked her Lord to come into His garden and eat and to dispense to whomsoever He wills. There is such a height in the spiritual life, that whatsoever one does to whomsoever he does is given to the Lord. People who do evil, though sinning against mankind, if they have reached the spirit of penitence, manifested in David (Psalm 51), will say that they have sinned against God only. Also, those who, like Abraham, live only for the Invisible God entreat strangers, not knowing who they are, and call many people in the singular—Lord (Genesis 18). Let no one distort the beauty of the lesson, which consists in referring everything to one cause—God, by faulty theological interpretations. To return:

The Lord goes into the garden and gathers His fruit. He knows how to assemble things: one fruit being tempered with another. He unites, so to say, "my myrrh with my spice." There is joy and perfume, even in the hardest crosses. He continues: "I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey." Purity from the fountain and sweetness.

"I have drunk my wine with my milk." One beverage tempering the other. Such a Lord lives for others; and He tests fruits and drinks before passing to other people. Lesson is this, that no one can really become a servant of such a Lord, if he does not partake first of what he ministers unto others. The Lord calls to a special class of people and addresses them: "O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

"Friend" is one of the sweetest words in the spiritual realm, for it speaks of confidence by which nothing is hid from the bosom of the friend. Jesus called His disciples "friends." "Drink abundantly," for out of our systems, if they have been filled to the uttermost, can flow rivers of living waters.

It is a mistake to read the verses of the Bible one after the other, as though they presented a sequence of events.

Often, between one verse and another and even among the clauses of each verse, there are unwritten events and unspoken teachings. This explains the method of Jesus' discourses, in which it seems that He goes from one topic to another. There is, however, an underground connection and inferred answers to silent objections.

The Shulamite now enters a new experience, and has to go through a new failure. Yes, a Christian goes also from failure to failure, realizing, at each step, man's helplessness and God's grace. The Shulamite now has entered deeper in the realm, and she says confidently: "I sleep but my heart waketh."

A book could be written on these words. Science has only begun to investigate the territory of subconsciousness; but the word of God has revealed, long ago, that there is in each human being an invisible territory. It is not the place to refer ourselves to the Psalms, where the appeal from the spirit to the soul is frequent. Of course, the words are not the same, but the thought is there, that something in the Psalmist encourages something else in himself. Remember Psalm 103, where the innermost in the worshipper exhorts his emotional nature to bless the Lord. Remember also when the Psalmist says, that in the night-watches, when the outer man sleeps, the spirit goes investigating and meditating upon past ages—illimited ages. It means that the Psalmist has by grace entered God's eternity. In the New Testament, it is the Blessed Virgin who sings, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced" (Luke 1). Perfect oneness between the soul, which is a link to the visible; and the spirit which links to the Invisible. This oneness does not come soon. St. Paul prays that the Thessalonians might be sanctified wholly and be preserved blameless in the spirit, soul, and body. But to proceed:

The Shulamite has reached the condition where her inner life is always in communion with the Infinite. At this

height, immediately follows a drawback, a failure. She testifies: "The voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." Let us consider the encouragements and praises of the Lord, for they are given not to make us boastful, but to prepare us for service. The Bridegroom describes Himself as One who has gone through some agony. He says: "For my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Nothing else does He say, for it remains to the understanding heart of the beloved, the Shulamite, to read the volume of sufferings in the few words.

But . . . the Shulamite in her ecstasies has not paid attention to the gentle knocking of the Lord. Indeed, the higher we go, the less audible, in a human sense, becomes the voice of the Lord, and His commands, rather than increasing, diminish. The Lord relies rather on our refined spiritual perception and loving heart than on voices and clear commands. It is the Bride who, having reached a singleness of heart, is called to divine the Bridegroom's needs and desires, rather than to expect, like a servant, to hear precise orders.

The calling at that hour of the night, after a day of the greatest blessings and fruitage, was not heeded by the Shulamite. She confessed, later, that it was the "voice" of the Lord; but, at the time, she did not even suppose such a calling. It had been just like some passing impression, shapeless and without substance. It seemed an unreasonable impression that she might interrupt her gentle sleep and deep spirit meditation to go out in the night, or even open the door. She had much to treasure and wanted the door closed, not opened. How many times, consecrated Christians miss glorious opportunities, for the commands and the desires of the Lord are expressed in a mode, scarcely noticeable. Only afterwards are the mistakes realized. And when the gentle "voice" has been heeded, pointing to steps which seemed insignificant and trivial—only afterwards

have we discovered what a blessing and result there has been in listening to that gentle voice.

The Shulamite in her ecstasies, speaking to herself, gave the reasons of her remaining still. "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" These are the reasonings of many people, still occupied with their own blessings and holiness. They have not yet learned what we may term, *the gospel of interruption*.

At the risk of making this chapter too long, I want to refer to the considerations of one of the best men, a gentle mystic. He speaks of some intruder, visiting him, while he was in deep communion with the Lord, enjoying His presence. The unwelcomed visitor, seemingly without any reason, began to tax his time and patience. The mystic felt provoked and annoyed. "Alas!" he exclaimed afterwards, "I did not perceive that in the tedious visitor, Thou, Oh my Lord, were hiding Thyself to prove to me that I was more occupied with my own consolations than with God Himself."

The Shulamite did open the door; but the gentle Lord was not to be seen. In going, His Spirit touched the sensible heart of the Shulamite, and she awoke, arose, and ran to open, but—alas!—too late. Sorrow and penitence filled her heart. Her hands dropped with myrrh, and the fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. She remembers with sadness: "My soul failed when He spake." It was a confession that her emotions had had the advantage on her innermost life. It is easy, until we are fully trained, to confuse "psyche" and "spirit." The day will come when the piercing sword of the Holy Spirit will make a clean division before our very eyes—spiritual eyes—of spirit and soul (Hebrews 4).

The Shulamite began her searching. She testifies: "I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but

He gave me no answer." She needed some experiences which would make her more alert to the voice—we should say, to the heart—and ways of her Beloved. Instead of finding, she was found by those whom she had least expected. Thus the report: "The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me."

A long story of sufferings and persecutions in these few words. The persecutions were all administered by the visible church, always active in human efforts and always severe toward the Invisible Church: smiting, wounding, and also taking, without charity, the veil off some mistakes and errors. The Shulamite, after all, is only a "dry stick," and it is not impossible to discover in her, at least, some appearance of evil.

So afflicted and put to confusion, she sought refuge in the friendship of her new children. She went to them, saying, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell Him, that I am sick of love." The Shulamite has learned a lesson of deeper humility after a deeper humiliation: she seeks help from people she considers more worthy, for they had not had her great experiences, which led to greater responsibilities. She pleads that they intercede for her.

The daughters of Jerusalem answer with a question and also praise her, trying to restore confidence in her to her own destiny. Indeed, many times, children help us, instead of our parents. It is one of the gracious promises of the Lord (Psalm 45:16). They answered, "What is thy Beloved more than beloved?" (The word "another" is not in the text.) As to say: "Why art thou so depressed?" They continued: "'O, thou fairest among women.' You are still what you are." Good children always look with love and reverence to parents, even spiritual parents. They con-

tinued: "What is thy Beloved more than beloved, that thou dost so charge us?"

The desolate accents of the Shulamite had deeply impressed the daughters of Jerusalem. They could not understand why she was in such a plight. According to them, the Lord would not require from her more than from others; she should not be so extreme in her sensitivity. Consequently, they were not understanding the reason of her distress and pathetic appeal. They tried to comfort her, as to say: "Be in peace. Do not trouble yourself more than others. After all, you are always yourself, enjoying His grace; and, to us, you are always the fairest among women."

The Shulamite does not answer about herself, but enters a description of her Beloved, a tender and, more and more, loving description, heightened by the reaction of her sorrows and consciousness of her failings. She poured her heart in the description of Him.

But of this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXVII

HER BELOVED'S BEAUTY

Song of Solomon 10:16

"'Fairest among women.' I!" We seem to detect a silent protest in the Shulamite, as she hears herself so qualified by the daughters of Jerusalem. True, that the Lord Himself had already asked her to show her countenance and give out her voice, for the voice was sweet and the countenance comely, but she had never considered herself worthy of such appreciations. It is one of the signs of real holiness, not to see one's own beauty, for in proportion as one grows heavenward, he loses self-admiration.

"I! Fair! You are mistaken. I will tell you who is really beautiful," and the Shulamite began to pour out the portrait of her Bridegroom. In order, however, to better appreciate the description of divine beauty, given by the Shulamite, we take the liberty here to insert some reflections on "beauty" as it is presented to us in the scriptures: there are several different kinds.

First, satanic beauty. We send the reader to Ezekiel 28, and Isaiah 14. It is a consensus among Bible students that these two chapters, under the figures of the prince of Tyrus and the king of Babylon, give to us, to some extent,

the portrait of satan. Ezekiel describes the prince of Tyrus as once being a cherub who had been anointed and who was like a covering, that is, at the head of some angelic host, adorned with many kinds of precious stones. An angel of great splendor was he, who walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire, which is, among other brilliant creatures. A special art was created by God at his being. It is said that he was filled with wisdom and possessed of a special beauty. But he became a worshipper of himself. So the scripture arrays him: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." By becoming a self-admirer, his brilliant qualities became instruments of destruction. Isaiah informs that his pomp has brought him down. He addresses satan: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."

But, was satan's beauty, a real one? and what is "beauty"? Before trying to answer such a question, let us look at some other types of beauty.

Saul, though not clearly presented as such, was no doubt a beautiful man; of a lofty stature, he was the man after the people's heart. The desire of many was towards him. We gather the portrait from various hints which seem casual and are scattered in various portions of the scriptures. Later on, Saul became gloomy and, no doubt, his countenance must have inspired terror rather than admiration.

Absalom, if living now, would be the "prince of fashion." He was beautiful, more than any man in Israel; but vanity and cruelty were stamped in his features. He

seemed heroic but, in the moment of disaster, proved to be a coward. Was he beautiful?

Against these two specimens of satanic beauty, we have Moses, described as possessing divine beauty, which is, "beautiful unto God." Against the lofty stature and majestic carriage of Saul, stands David, who was an average-sized man, but of a countenance which bespoke wisdom and ability. We should not forget the appearance of Eliab, the elder brother of David; he was a young man of a lofty stature, beautiful countenance, parading himself with a majestic carriage before the prophet. The Lord had rejected him. Later on, when Goliath challenged Israel, neither of the two gigantic figures, Saul nor Eliab, showed any courage. When David fearlessly asked about the arrogance of the giant, the vain Eliab insulted his youngest brother, and we see a monstrous grin on his face.

There is no beauty without a fund of goodness and justice. In some language, the idea of goodness and beauty are intermingled. Esthetics and ethics go together. This is not a theory, but a scientific statement, for beauty is a relative word and is visible especially in the eyes and in the glow of ones countenance. From the innermost being, above any human effort, irradiates in the eyes and in the face what is hidden in the heart. Wicked people have something repellent in their eyes and faces, shown by sinister lightnings and flickering shades which inspire fright and disgust. Good people—and we use the term "good" in a moderate, relative sense—show in their faces and glances something which attracts and inspires confidence.

But what about our Christ? There are two opposite pictures of Him. We select only two, besides the one which is the theme of this chapter, in the words of the Shulamite.

Isaiah (chapter 53) says: "He hath no form, nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him."

Psalm 45 gives a different picture: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips."

Why these two pictures—both from inspired pens? Isaiah begins to speak as a representative of the unredeemed, who have distorted ideals and, consequently, see things in distorted shapes. In fact, "seeing" is in close relation with "feeling." The ideals of mankind are those of brute force and pride. They could not see beauty in meekness and suffering. Moreover, real beauty is joined with humility and modesty, and hides itself. The ideal of the world is, "show, parade thyself." This set of considerations is one of the main proofs of the uniqueness in Jesus' Personality. He presented in His Person and teachings ideals which are counter to those of the world. When the heart is full of vanity and the mind of prejudice, there is no clearness in the eye, to discover real beauty and goodness in others.

Psalm 45 is a song of a lover. The Bride speaks of the King. Love is a great teacher and revealer. The Shulamite had seen in her Beloved a fairness which was above any human conception. Without examining what was behind that attraction, she points out only to one quality, "Grace is poured into thy lips." Looking to that mouth and those lips, pouring forth only benevolent words, having no guile nor violence, she was led to embrace the whole of that countenance and see her matchless fairness. But to return:

The Shulamite did not say to those who were praising her something like this: "Oh no, I am not beautiful; I am ugly." She did not waste time in words of self-despising. Let others do that, but not that saint. She will waive immediately the subject about herself, and will invite her friends to look on real beauty. No comparison is made: silence about herself was the best introduction to the song concerning the Beloved.

"What is thy Beloved more than beloved?" Such had been part of the interrogation. Listen, she seems to say,

inviting them by her glances to use also the vision of the eye. In fact, to "see" accompanies the other senses if they have to work in harmony. She says: "My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand."

It is not so much the color, but the harmony between candor and energy which is hinted. No mere candor, nor mere force, but the two blended in one. The words "ten thousand" are symbolic, for "thousands," in the oriental language, stands for multitude; and "ten" is the maximum that man's hands can hold.

The Shulamite said in substance: "He is the chief in whatever crowd ye put Him." And we, too, echo her statement by affirming that Jesus is above every mass of people in every nation, in every age—far above every progress and civilization. The more we grow, the higher we see Him.

Th Shulamite is not satisfied by describing, so to say, in a synthesis, but comes down to details. She speaks of the head and contrasts in it two colors: that of fine gold and of blackness as of a raven. Without intuition, we cannot make anything of this description. The blackness of healthy hair combines with the splendor of light on His head. Then, she describes the eyes and compares them as those of doves, hinting, by this act, modesty which is so becoming in real beauty. Eyes by rivers of waters, washed with milk, fitly set. Tenderness, richness, and surety of gaze are in these descriptions.

"His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: His lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh." Perfumes in His countenance, which seems made of flowers that give, on being seen, the sense of taste, sweetness. Looking on the lips before He speaks, one hears something about His sacrifice. But it is not a harsh exposition. The bitterness of myrrh is for Himself; those who look to the lips sense sweetness. Then, she describes the hands, whose fingers are as gold rings set with precious stones. She continues and

goes down to the description of the legs, which announced a determined walk, for they were pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold. Firmness, coupled with determination of rich faith in the ultimate issue. Not satisfied, she goes back to the description of the head and says: "His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars." A beautiful forest of strong pleasant trees is before our vision. She does not yet leave the description, but adds: "His mouth is most sweet." Without hearing any word from Him, the first impression is of a something which soothes human troubles, for the word "sweet," used by the Shulamite means much more than the taste of sugar: it medicates and leaves a sense of rest. The human language is at loss for words, and the Shulamite feels the insufficiency of her vocabulary: "Yea, He is altogether lovely." From whatever point you consider Him, there is a harmony which makes Him, from every point of view and every aspect, altogether attractive and worthy of love.

Then we seem to look on the face of the Shulamite and see, discover a movement of an innocent child, who, with a smile, concludes a very sketchy but sincere report. As she would say much more, but is not able, and that silence would complete the description. It seems she says:

"You asked me who He is, and what special relation He is to me; my answer in conclusion is: This is my Beloved and this is my Friend. Only Beloved? Oh! no, I enjoy intimate interviews with Him. He honors me with His friendship. You marvel that I am sick of love and am anxious to find Him? This. . . this"—and we detect in the word an accent of absolute uniqueness—"this, no other, not less." And she concludes: "O daughters of Jerusalem."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SEARCHERS OF CHRIST THROUGH THE SHULAMITE

Song of Solomon 6

No word about herself had the Shulamite given to those who had asked her, but only a heart-felt description of the Beloved. She had charged them—the daughters of Jerusalem—that in finding Him, they would tell Him that she was sick of love. Then, she had described the Bridegroom in words which no poem could ever attain. The words, we have; but the pathos in the voice, the glow in the eyes—only the Holy Spirit is able to reproduce. The daughters of Jerusalem had listened and were enthralled; and, when the Shulamite stopped, instead of answering and promising to make search for Him, they became questioners and exclaimed: "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with thee."

The unexpected question meant to say: "Who, better than thou, can find Him, since deep love gives a scent by which thou art led in the right track to look and find?" Indeed, real love possesses a unique perception and leads in the right track to look for an object or a person we have missed.

The Shulamite had previously confessed her ignorance on the whereabouts of her Beloved, but on being so addressed by her new followers, her spirit of perception became intense and acute. Before we comment our answer, a word is due on the address to her by the daughters of Jerusalem.

More than once, the Beloved had addressed her with encouraging words: "O thou fairest among women." He had said to her in the beginning of her desolations, "My dove . . . sweet is thy voice, thy countenance is comely." This was said when the Shulamite was keeping herself in hiding and was, so to say, hating her own voice and countenance. On occasion, she had been called, "Fair, my love, thou art fair, thou hast dove's eyes," and she had also been called "sister," spouse. After so much commentation from Him, recognition finally came from her followers who, in turn, addressed her almost in the same words that had been previously said by the Bridegroom. It is always this, God's method, that He first encourages in secret the humble and humbled ones, and, then, these will be encouraged and praised by those who are beginning, though slowly, to walk in the same footsteps. To proceed:

The daughters of Jerusalem entreated her to inform them about Him and asked to be allowed to seek Him in her company. As they would say: "Who is better qualified than thou to know and seek? Since thy description of Him has moved us to desire Him, who is a better leader than thou in presenting us to such a One?"

It happens that deep Christians are ignorant, at times, of something important, and they are not ashamed to confess their limitations. But it happens, too, that soon after vouching incapacity, light shines in their spirits, and they begin to see and know just the thing they had ignored.

"Where is He?" asked the Shulamite. "Where is He?" asked, in turn, the daughters of Jerusalem. The Shulamite

by now had received a revelation and answered: "My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." Where else could He have gone? We are reminded of the anxious search of two gentle pilgrims who had lost the boy Jesus, and had sought Him in many places when, at last, they resorted to the only building in which He could be found, in the temple.

The Shulamite knew by now the only place where her Beloved was to be found. Garden, spices, lilies—each word would require a chapter itself; but we proceed. She continued: "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine: He feedeth among the lilies." It seems boastful for poor creatures to affirm that Christ is ours, yet the possessive pronoun follows the confession that we have become His. It is one of those "inverted languages," leading to some hidden mysteries. In this case, the entire yielding to the Lord makes Him, so to say, our property. Just the same that a vessel filled with the water of the ocean should say, that it possesses the ocean, while it is in reality possessed by the huge mass of water. This reflection of an "inverted language" opens to us the mystery of prayer. We take as much of God as we have been taken by Him. When infinity possesses us, we, in turn, possess infinity.

"He feedeth among the lilies." Man does not live by bread alone; Jesus meant, on that occasion, by material bread. There are many kinds of feedings, as there are many kinds of transfusions. The presence of lilies—gentle, modest flowers—are food to Him whose heart yearns after sincere fellowship.

The Bridegroom has been found, as soon as the proper place had been mentioned; He speaks now. The words of Him seem addressed only to the Shulamite, but were meant mainly for her followers. For, in proportion as honest people see how the Lord loves and commands us, in the

same proportion will they heed our message. He says: "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners." The three comparisons need an explanation, which would lead us away from our subject. No earthly city or any aggregation of people deserve such commentations: beautiful, comely, terrible. (The word "terrible" means, full of reverence, and creates a certain awe.) When the Lord speaks, He creates the fruits of His lips. The Shulamite is receiving, more and more; and, entering a higher beauty and comeliness, she is no more alone but has a following and with them displays banners of grace and truth.

Then the Bridegroom continues praising her, and ends with the words: "My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother . . . the daughters saw her and blessed her." Now is the time for her followers, new followers, to express their amazement at the one who in the beginning had been ignored, if not despised altogether. They say: "Who is she, that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners."

"Morning," a new beginning, resurrection power.

"Moon," reflected light that does not offend the eyes which are not yet strong enough to look at the sun.

"Sun" itself, in its clearness, discovers even the dust in the atmosphere.

The followers finally repeat, more or less, the same words of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. It has been observed by great educators, that the sure influence of a leader is evidenced by the fact that the followers begin, almost unconsciously, to repeat his words, no longer as a mere lesson, but as they were their own. It is the law of incarnation which rules in the universe.

Another picture:

The Shulamite imitates the Bridegroom and she herself descends into the garden—the depths of her inner life. As we grow in the Lord, we become more and more enlarged and discover in ourselves “garden,” “flowers,” and “fruit.” We inspect, led by the Inspector. The Shulamite testifies: “I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.”

“Nuts” to feed the weak ones.

“Vine” is a type of Christ and the Church, speaking of communion.

“Pomegranate seeds,” red seeds, compacted together, under the protection of a hard shell—types of the unity of the Church.

While she was inspecting, the Shulamite discovered another phase of her progress. She informs: “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.” Ready for swift and clear messages. It reminds us of the cherubims in Ezekiel, ready to go, to return, to stop. At this point there is a pleading that the Shulamite may not remain absorbed in the garden and in the chariots. Her followers need her and entreat: “Return, return.” Of this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXIX

PLEADERS WITH THE SHULAMITE— ENLARGEMENTS

Song of Solomon 6:13; 7

"Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee."

There are many exhortations to "return." At times, from the Lord Himself; on this occasion, by the people who want, more and more, to closely follow the Shulamite. We all are in danger to prefer remaining on the Mount of Transfiguration, while needy ones expect us in the valley. The pleaders with the Shulamite asked only one favor, that they might look upon her. It is true that people have ultimately to look only on the Lord, but for a time they have to see Him through some medium. There is a danger of looking too much at leaders—we mean real leaders in Christ. We know that there is only one Leader and Master, one Mediator and Saviour; but we also know that by the law of "extended incarnation" of the Christ in His Church, there are *sub*-leaders, teachers, pastors, even saviours and redeemers. Nothing pleases a leader more than to multiply himself in and through others. When Augustine heard Ambrose in Milan, he was attracted at first not to the Lord, but to the servant, and confesses that he did not know, at

the time, that by being attracted to Ambrose, he would be helped, someday, to be attached to the Lord of Ambrose.

The daughters of Jerusalem wanted to look on the Shulamite, for she bore the reflection of the face of the Beloved. It is proper to emphasize the fellowship of the saints and to see in each of them a partial aspect of the Christ. Each saint reflects some attributes of the Lord. Let us then, allow the daughters of Jerusalem to entreat the Shulamite—the mature elects—to be permitted to look to her. Someday they, too, will look to Jesus only. St. Paul exhorted the Philippians to become his imitators, inasmuch as he had become an imitator of Christ.

Someone asked those who were pleading to look upon the Bride, while they were so entreating her. The question is not one of sneer or incredulity, but of marvel and desire to be instructed. They said: "What will He see in the Shulamite?" And they, the seekers, answered, "as it were the company of two armies."

Up to now, we heard only of one army, which was the Shulamite herself and her close followers. But the things of the Lord go by two—confirmation. Jacob, on his frightened return from Laban, saw angels, like armies, double armies, sure protection. The pleaders with the Shulamite wanted themselves to become another army, and they saw the future fulfillment carried in the Shulamite herself.

After they had answered those who questioned them, they turned to the Shulamite and began to address her with words of admiration and affection. They said, "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter!" Naked feet were those of the slaves, whereas the children wore shoes. They began by praising what symbolizes walk, done with wisdom and prudence by shod feet. "Prince's daughter" is a new title; the word "prince" referring to one who is the first among many illustrious people. "Daughter" is one of the sweetest relations in the human family. Others

were daughters of Jerusalem, but the Shulamite was called the Prince's daughter. The daughters turned to her, as they would say: "We are children of Jerusalem; we have come through a second election, but thou are unique, one daughter, the only daughter of the One who is really the Prince.

In the commentations of the Beloved to the Shulamite, there are many material descriptions of beauty which may be offensive to the carnal mind, but are like many windows by which spiritual people look into divine beauties. God uses earthly comparisons to instruct of heavenly realities. Many people had been already offended at the Shulamite; she had been ousted and persecuted by the children of the mother, exposed and beaten by the watchmen; but on remaining faithful to her Beloved and describing Him in the most endearing expressions, she herself became endeared by an ever-growing number of followers and admirers. These describe her spiritual beauties with material figures, as the reader may see (chapter 7:2-9). It is to be noted that her admirers conclude by praising the Shulamite's mouth, as the Shulamite herself had concluded one of her messages by praising the Beloved's mouth. Of course, in the letter, the words concerning the mouth are spoken by the Shulamite herself, but they are an answer to a spoken or unspoken praise and what she answered after she heard the praises of others. "The roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my Beloved, that goes down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak." It is a decision to use our mouth and sweet mode of speaking only for testifying of her Beloved, and in such a way that the listeners would praise Him, even during the sleeping hours.

Again an affirmation of a mutual belonging: "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." Let us note that the second part of mutual possession is toned down, whereas, at first, she had said that her Beloved was hers: now, on

confirming that she belonged to Him, she says, "His desire is toward me." And if we take out the word "His" (for it is not in the text), we read that she belonged to the Bridegroom and to His desire for her, which means, in whatsoever He would be pleased to command and lead.

Soon after she had affirmed her relation to Him, she heard a calling to a higher work: "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field; and let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyard; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves." Coming, abiding, going. These three commands—Come, Abide, Go—regulate the whole Christian life. After each "going" there is always a new beginning, a continuous coming. It is the going in and out, promised to the sheep who follow the shepherd. Coming more in, and deeply abiding leads to going more forth, enlarging the tent (Isaiah 54), and extending into the field. No cities are mentioned, for, little by little, big places will prove a delusion. It is spoken only of villages, small groups. It reminds us of the little flock mentioned by Jesus, and that Jerusalem—the real, new Jerusalem—will be composed of villages, a few here, a few there. "Let us lodge in the villages." Let us henceforth take—and the "us" means really "thou."

Oh! Shulamite, let us care more and more of things which appear small and insignificant. "Let us get up early." It really means "thou," for the Lord never sleeps. Let us consider the vineyards and look for the flowers and tender grape, and see if the pomegranates bud forth, which means that a real unity is coming up, following the building up of the body, toward maturity and unity.

There, in this extension of manifold care and love for others, "thou will receive, more and more, from me." Hence the promise: "There will I give thee my loves." It is a new beginning, and there are so many loves which are reflec-

tions of the infinite love of God to all creation and creatures: it is a love, ever-expanding and deepening, yet never diminishing but becoming higher, deeper, wider in proportion as it is apprehended and received. At the gates, entrances of every new service and consecration, "are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old." Old things which might even have been discarded are redeemed and made useful, even attracted by the One who knows how to turn all things to His own glory and to the service of mankind.

"New and old which I have laid hold for thee." And after that comes, repeated with a deeper meaning,—deeper not in Him who spoke, for there it was always of the same depth, but in the apprehension and receiving of the one who listens and gets, more and more, according to the enlargements of his capacities,—the concluding appellation:

"O my Beloved!"

CHAPTER XXX

FOLLOWERS' DESIRES AND APPEALS

Song of Solomon 8:1-5

The Christian life is interspersed with many little "whiles." We are reminded of the "little while" in Jesus' last discourse to the Eleven (John 16). In a little while, seeing; in a little while, not seeing. It is a prophecy of the alternate experiences in the Christian life.

After the great blessings and joys of the previous chapter, the Shulamite goes through one of those long experiences so frequent in the mystical life. She holds a silent conversation, or rather an entreating appeal to the Beloved: she feels lonesome and desires some closed interview with no indiscreet eyes to disturb. Like in a trance, after her saying what she would like to do and what to give to Him, she exclaims: "His left hand under my head, and His right hand should embrace me." To the natural man, these words may seem, if not vulgar, at least very human: human they are, but not in a worldly sense. In the realm of the Spirit, the human becomes divine; and the divine, human. In other words, the natural enters the supernatural; and the supernatural becomes natural.

The Shulamite has only been in a trance and has spoken to herself. She perceives a silent communication from her

Beloved; she needs to be entirely calm in order not to miss the inner conversation which is about to take place. There must be a suspension of all the exterior activities of the soul and of the mind. Even the smallest stir, in or out, must be avoided; yet, by this time, the Shulamite is very seldom alone, for devout followers are more and more clinging to her, desirous of asking questions. She turns to them with the entreat: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please." Absolute dependence on Him, not even asking for a special visitation for herself. The time of frequent asking has past; entire abandonment to Him is being, more and more, entered in.

There is such a thing in the advanced Christian life, that one stops to pray *his own* prayers and identifies himself in the *Name*; he is satisfied only with what comes from above, at times, without asking. It is the real prayer in the Name; it is based on the yielding of our capacities to the Lord and being indifferent to everything, except to Him, from and in Him. The pronoun "my" is not in the text; consequently, the Shulamite does not entreat that they, the daughters, should not awake the "my love," who is her love, but not to awake "love," in general. She perceives that the Bridegroom wants absolute rest. It is one of those inverted languages, by which what man should do is presented as the Lord's doing. The Shulamite exhorts her followers to absolute rest and silence, asking no sensible blessings, desiring no waves of heavenly ecstasies but an entire emptiness. They should ask, urge nothing, but remain in a passive condition, ready to do anything the Lord should command, give, or communicate. "Be still, do nothing, ask nothing; remain in that absolute silence—even inner silence, 'until He please.'"

The silence is broken, and two speak: one says—it is the expressed, or not expressed admiration of the followers

of the Shulamite. They are many, and they are one. He—they—say: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" No one answered, but someone now speaks, addressing the one about whom the question had been raised. The Beloved speaks to the Shulamite and not the followers. Deep teaching is in this, which makes us understand that the Shulamite herself had been asking the same question in different words. The followers had said: "Who is this?" She had said often to herself: "Who am I?"

Marvel of marvels! We could scarcely believe that we—and the "we" is a confession of absolute unworthiness—have so much received and so much been made by God's grace. The Beloved speaks to her: "I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee." It is the unwritten history of the Shulamite, which is compared to a little child, born under a tree. Being an apple tree, it is a type of Christ; but the mother could do no more than that, which is, abandoning the little one under the shadow of Christ, for she thought, "He will do what is needed."

We are dealing with spiritual things; consequently, we must become familiar to a mystical language. We do not look for an individual woman as the mother, but for all the consequences of her past, which led her to entrust the beginning of a new life, as a wee, tender baby under the apple tree. There, the Lord took her and began her training and bringing up.

After having reminded her in a few words and, through her, reminding the daughters of Jerusalem of the unwritten history from her babyhood on, the Lord gives her a last appeal and exhortation which will complete her training up to a stature, preparing her for the work henceforth.

Far it be that we should minimize one man in order to exalt another. Paul, Peter and others are all luminaries

in the Church, having received not *separate* gospels, but *one* gospel. The diversity was not in the substance of the message, but in the methods to be used with different classes of hearers. But this is out of our immediate subject. We desire to call attention to Peter who, in his old age, teaches that there is a time, "after that ye have suffered a while," that the God of all grace will make you perfect, established, strengthened, settled (1 Peter 5:10). It is the last part of Peter's first Epistle.

What a difference between the Simon of the first days and the mature, aged Apostle who wrote the Epistle! What a contrast between the perplexed Shulamite who had just began to be free of the children of the mother and was perplexed about what to do and where to go, and the Shulamite who now recommends rest and calm to the daughters of Jerusalem! She has now reached the maturity by which her Beloved will confirm that covenant of love and faithfulness, by which she will be forever identified with her Bridegroom.

We remember that the Lord, after years of repeated blessing and promises to Abraham, did finally confirm the covenant and the blessings by an exhortation: "When Abraham was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abraham, and said unto him, I, the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." It is the condensation of all the past promises and blessings. At this terminal point, the patriarch was reminded of what he knew before, that God alone has power; consequently, man should stop scheming. He was exhorted that the real life in God is, ultimately, not in the raptures and flights—needed as they are, now and then,—but in a steady, monotonous walk. The patriarch was reminded, that God's plan for him was perfection which could be attained by continuously cultivating God's presence. In other words, walking always in the presence of God would make Abraham perfect. To return:

The Bridegroom, after summing up her life story from infancy to the present, condenses all the exhortations of the past and teachings in these words:

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.”

Of this, with God’s grace, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BRIDEGROOM'S FINAL MESSAGE

Song of Solomon 8:6-7

The words in the verses mentioned above are to be read slowly and weighed carefully. It is up to this point, the synthetic and last message of the Bridegroom to the Shulamite. After this exhortation, we have no more His words in the book: there was no need.

The Shulamite treasured the message and the voice; the words were like a stream of water, never failing her in the wilderness. It was not *that*, but *this* message, a continuous present. It reminds us of what Peter wrote of the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, referring to the words of the Father concerning Jesus whom they should hear. Peter says *this*, not that voice, for the sound kept ringing in his inner life. But, to the message of the Shulamite:

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

We lament the brevity imposed upon us by which we cannot write as much as we would, on so intense and far-reaching a message. Only a few words.

"Set" indicates a determined action; we remember the same word when Jesus determined to go to Jerusalem: He *set* His face. There are actions which must be preceded and accompanied by a determination which gives them a course which opposing forces can never deviate. "Set me as a seal . . ." "Seal" is a word, worthy of consideration in the scriptural language. From Noah to the last pages of the Epistles, the word, "seal," "sealing" occurs often.

In the law of man, seals are applied to properties, documents, which have to be kept only for a certain time. It is a crime, heavily punished, to break seals. Seals are made by some engraving of letters and names on some melted material before it hardens: the name, the letter remains. The Lord notices that the heart of the Shulamite has reached such a melted tenderness and devotion, that now is the time, before it cools, to apply a seal. No illusions: the best saints had and have spasms of tenderness and hardenings. Let the sealing come while the "wax" is melted and hot; later, it may be impossible. This applies to all our relations with heaven: it explains the exhortation in Isaiah 55:6. "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."

Inverted language is this, meaning that man must seek and call while his capacities are open and receptive to God's influence. There are seasons of great Godly waves: then and there, man must seal something, for the dry season will soon come. Only what is sealed remains. Let us not be satisfied of the blessings in our prayers and communions, but let us see that at each time something has become our possession. There are various degrees of sealings. The one, commanded to the Shulamite, is of capital importance,

leading to all the future relations with the Lord: a seal upon the heart and a seal upon the arm.

"Heart" means love, life; "arm" stands for work and activities. The high priest of Israel, when dressed with the holy vestments, had to carry the names of Israel engraved on twelve precious stones, which he had to carry on his bosom and on two other stones which were to be carried on his shoulders. Love and service go together. We are reminded of the parable in two parts of the virgins and of the talents, which exhorts the Church to have oil in the inner life and be active on the outside. In another portion of the scriptures, we are exhorted to be fervent in the spirit and serving the Lord. Love and work; fervency and service; emotion and practice are linked together. When love fails, service will become negligent and disappear: when service is lacking, love becomes mere emotion which ends in falsity and hypocrisy. The command of the Bridegroom means: "Consecrate your heart entirely to me; take thy delight only in me; and to me alone refer all thy work and actions."

It does not mean that we must love no one else, or do nothing else than to be occupied with some manifest religious work. God is wise and just, and wants us to love all creation and creatures and, as much as possible, to be always serving Him. A saint of old expressed the thought by saying, that we must love the enemy for God's sake, and the friend in Him. Activities we have—and many, but we must always have God's service in view and do everything under His eyes.

After the Lord had ordered the Bride the setting of a seal on the heart and on the arm, He gave the reason why this was—*is* imperative. Only divine love can stand death, even crucifixion. Man's will power fails; divine love, never. Such love makes the Bride jealous that God's supremacy can never be challenged by other affections, or become cold by chilling experiences. Love is a vehement flame

which goes through cold surroundings. The Lord does not hide from the Shulamite, that she must go through experiences of deep sufferings. Floods will come, but divine Love can never be quenched or drowned. There is a symbol in one of the portraits in the Pilgrims Progress. An enemy was trying to quench a large fire by throwing buckets of water on it. The fire seemed for a moment to go out, but just for a moment, for soon it was retaking force. Christian marvelled, but the guide showed him the secret: behind a wall, unseen, was standing one with a vessel of oil, pouring it through a secret orifice; thus continuously feeding the fire. It is needed—a continuous flow on the sealed heart and arm, so that love and work may not fail.

The last words of the exhortation show by contrast the real values of things. We repeat them: "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned." Everything under the sun has a price. We remember having read in a fictitious book, that Lucifer, travested as a prince, was showing a journalist a gathering of brilliant society people. When the dazzled journalist asked information about various persons, prince Lucifer answered: "For sale." Everything, everybody was there "For sale." Of course, the price varies: some things and some people are very expensive. For some the prices are low; for others, high and higher. He who does not sell himself for a thousand may be approached by larger sums, ever-larger; he who may not be amenable by the lure of money may be purchased by the ambition of honor or other inducements. There are various prices and modes of exchange. Everything and everybody has a price, but the heart and arm of the Shulamite are in no danger of being bought by any human value. Even if earthly man would offer all the substance of his house, which means—even if all humanity, all mankind as one individual would offer her all the world, the Shulamite would quietly and smilingly

answer and motion, *No*. She would say: "Lose no time in offering praises; or anything else; I am already sold forever: my heart and arm are and will remain sealed only for one Person." Applying this to the life of mature Christians who have been sealed and confirmed, they keep answering to the lures of the visible: "Do not lose time with me; I have been bought with a price, even the price of blood; I ignore and despise all the offers."

But let us keep well in mind that the impossibility to buy refers only to one kind of love, for all others are in danger. It refers to the Shulamite's love for the Bridegroom which is sealed upon the heart and arm. When the Lord wanted to assure His people of His eternal faithfulness, He addresses her with these words: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isaiah 49:15-16). A mother's love—the strongest—may fail; God's love, never. The document of assurance is, "I have graven thee upon my palms."

Let us open John's Gospel at chapter twenty, verses 19-20. The disciples had received the news of Jesus' resurrection. Some had already seen Him, but doubt and fear remained, for the appearance may have been of a spectre or a delusion. The fear of the Jews was still on them. They were united, full of expectation and perplexity, but had shut the doors, fearing enemies. Jesus "came and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace unto you." The fact that He had come through closed doors and had said, "Peace," was important; yet not above any shade of doubt, for many can say "peace." Even spirits enter through closed doors: satan can transform himself into an angel of light and imitate faces and voices. But Jesus did not

stop at those proofs. "When He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side."

They could see the imprint of the nails and the heavy wound. The stigmata cannot be imitated. Faces, words may have counterfeits, but scars of the Crucifixion are forbidden to be reproduced by inimical powers. They were the credentials above every doubt and suspicion; they were enough, for we read: "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." They had seen Him when He entered and spoke; but, in the language of the meditative Apostle, only after the showing of the imprints and of the wound—only then had there been a real: *they saw*.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE YOUNGER SISTER

Song of Solomon 8:8-10

When we look back to the history of the Shulamite, we find her, in the beginning, alone and desolate. She had learned the negative but not yet the positive side concerning the Real Church. She had a deep perception of the truth, which is beautifully expressed somewhere in the scriptures as embracing a thing from a distance. The Shulamite, separating herself from the influential children of the mother, had no followers and was perplexed as to which way to turn. The merciful Lord heeding her appeal pointed the way. Remaining herself, never imitating others, she would feed her kids by the shepherds' tents.

"Kids" is not a promising word; it refers to a people who in the eyes of religionists are outcasts. The encouragement was in what the Lord called her "fairest among women" and on the pronoun "thy," prefixed to that class of people of whom she would take care of. "Let others call them kids, but thou wilt consider them thine, for I have destined thee to shepherd them."

The sufferings and temptations she did undergo, we have tried to relate in previous chapters. But, little by little, a group of people was formed around her. The despised

ones were not kids but daughters of Jerusalem. In this case, we must understand the heavenly Jerusalem. They were daughters: the word expresses unpretensions and weaknesses. The same ones are also called "daughters of Zion."

The Shepherdess and the tended-people kept both growing till the Shulamite became the "sealed one" of the previous chapter, and the followers had reached a stature which raised hopes to their usefulness.

As soon as she had obeyed the recommendation of the Beloved and placed Him as a seal on the heart and arm, without any boasting but with artless simplicity, she spoke of her followers. "We have a little sister, and she hath no breast: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"

We remember Jesus speaking in the plural—"we"—to Nicodemus. The Shulamite has also learned to use the plural. Many lessons: a Christian has to use the singular when speaking of his own faults. David acknowledged his own iniquities and sin; he did not say "ours." However, when referring to privileges and attainments, a Christian must learn to say "we" and "ours." In the prayer Jesus taught the disciples, the first word is a plural pronoun, "Our Father." While the saint may see himself alone in his struggles, he should never credit himself, or himself alone, his attainments. He feels a debtor to all mankind and recognizes that he has learned from everybody; moreover, he feels to be in fellowship with an unseen company of angels and brethren; consequently, what he possesses belongs to many, not to himself alone.

There is also another lesson: the Shulamite is so identified with her Beloved since she has put Him as a "seal," that she considers everything as a possession in common with Him. The "we" is a confession of the past benefits and constant grace by which she arrived at her growth and even in having a following. There is a courage which is coupled

with humility and which is pleasing to the Lord. Since it is God's plan to have the Church cooperate with Him, the Church, accepting the privilege, speaks in the plural and refers everything to the Lord Himself and to the body of saints.

"We have a little sister." Two thoughts are in these words. This young person belongs to the family and will grow in its likeness, but she is still small, immature. She cannot give food to others. The day will come that she will be spoken of. What then? The answer:

"If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar." Some Christians are "walls"; others are "doors." Walls are built during affliction, like the walls of the post-exile Jerusalem, but they are also a protection: no enemy can reach the interior of a city without offending first the walls. Moreover, the Lord has ordered that watchmen be stationed on the walls. Since the little sister may be a "wall," she can be used not only for protection, but for watching. She will be a palace of silver, an outpost attracting people who appreciate redemption. She will have several others as co-workers. We remember one of the first prayers of the Shulamite: "Draw me and we will run after thee." One wall, many watchers in a palace—a great unity and readiness.

Attractive watchers, palace of silver. The little sister may be a *door* which is a means of entrance. Though there is *one door*—in Christ—there are many doors, which are many who represent an entrance into the Kingdom. Scribes and Pharisees are closing the doors; the Shulamite and followers are becoming "doors" themselves. It is not easy to become a "door," for people are afraid of entering into something altogether new. Consequently, there is a need of a certain toning down, that one's importance should not be too prominent. People are jealous. In everything in

life, there must be a gradual ascent, going always from the known to the unknown. Wisdom is needed. Jesus came to us as a *man*; the door must present something of humanity, hence the "door" must be enclosed with boards of cedar. "Cedar" stands for humanity. Many times we must appear to others like they are, in order that they be made as we are.

By this time, the little sister has become confident in her own attainments and speaks for herself: "I am a wall, and my breast like towers." I am ready to suffer, to support the palace, and to feed others." Soon after saying this, she acknowledged what she has received: "Then was I in His eyes as one that found favor."

Then? So soon? Had the little sister grown up in so short a time?

The Kingdom belongs to those who take it by force. In the realm of faith, we call things our own, before we have a practical possession of the same. When the little sister heard what were the requirements to become useful, she immediately affirmed by faith that she had those requisites. Her boldness and readiness to suffer were soon rewarded. The Lord made her what she had been encouraged to affirm that she was. She found grace, and the little sister, the following of the Shulamite, unites in the service of the Lord.

The Shepherdess is no more alone. The time she was ostracized and had no companions is past forever. She is now really a builder and, consequently, has been herself built forever in the Body of Christ—The Invisible Church.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPERS—"CAUSE ME." TRANSLATE ME

Song of Solomon 8:11-14

If there would be any doubt about the mystical meaning of the Song of Solomon, it should be dispelled by the concluding verses of its final chapter. The reference to Solomon as hiring a vineyard would be out of place in an earthly love song; and out of place also would be the entreat of the Bride to the Bridegroom which terminates the book. However, our aim is not to examine or answer biblical criticisms, but to meditate on the union and communion of the Shulamite—Church—and her Beloved—Christ. The things of the Spirit cannot be apprehended by human logic, but only by intuition and revelation. The more our spirits thirst after the Infinite, the more the Infinite opens and flows revelations. But to our subject:

The Shulamite in the beginning, as we have noticed, was ostracized and, seemingly, without any work. She calls her own life a vineyard and complains that in doing the work imposed on her by the children of the mother, she has neglected herself. The "herself" she called "vineyard." She could foresee at the time that she would someday have a vineyard and become a real keeper of vineyards. Often

things which happen to us in the natural are prophetic of our spiritual destiny.

At the end of her rich experience, the Shulamite informs: "Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand of silver." "Solomon" is a type of the Lord under the title, "Prince of Peace." The Shulamite mentions His name, for she wants to keep herself unknown by mortal eyes in her new ministry. She has discovered not only small groups, but also the whole Church which is compared to a vineyard. This Body is scattered among visible things and among people of various confessions and pursuits. The vineyard is in Baalhamon—a place of fruitage after diligent work. This vineyard is entrusted to various individuals—keepers.

When we remember that the seven letters of the second and third chapters of Revelation are addressed to angels and know that "angel" is the composite ministry of the Church, we understand that the Shulamite has been entrusted with a spiritual supervision of the entire vineyard.

The Body, Church, has its Head—Christ. But Christ is incarnated in people who have the spiritual direction of His work. In the mystical language, one individual is often the result of many persons and personalities. The Church must be one, although the members are many. The Shulamite is in the same time an individual and a group. The many become one. These few, though scattered and distant from each other in the visible, have been made one in the realm of the Spirit. Time and space do not exist in such a realm. They are spirits touching spirits. The "one" and "many" form the spiritual supervising of Solomon's vineyard. The keepers may never see the Shulamite, but she sees and, by the ministry in the Spirit, she reaches them.

We ask the reader to consider Colossians 1:23. The Apostle testifies that the Gospel had been preached to every

creature, creation which is under heaven. This was literally impossible; yet it had been accomplished at that time and is continuously accomplished in the Spiritual Realm. The Shulamite understands the vineyard and the keepers. Everyone of these real servants, keepers will bring fruit, "a thousand of silver." The figure "thousand" stands for abundance, the maximum according to what each one has received. Objectively, the fruit varies, but in the Spirit has one value, if each one has done his utmost.

The Shulamite, while supervising the whole field, is not herself without a special portion entrusted to her care. No more the children of the mother, but the Beloved Himself has made her keeper of vineyards and has given her a vineyard for herself. She speaks: "My vineyard which is mine, is before me." It is her own life; but also those who are nearest to her are called to watch and pray with her and to share the struggles and temptations.

That it is so, we gather from the earthly life of Jesus, who commented to the disciples that they had endured with Him in His temptations. Of course, the disciples were immature; but the commentation is a prophecy of when the Church will be in the condition of reciprocally enduring in the temptations one of the other. It was in Gethsemane that the Lord desired the nearness and comfort of a few. The three disciples failed, but the event is prophetic of the time when a few will stand watching and praying with and by the Shulamite. The Shulamite addresses her Beloved: "Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred."

The Bride is always eager that work in union and communion must bring fruit, permanent and abundant. Looking around to her immediate co-workers, while asking nothing for herself, she pleads that the keepers, close to her, must have each one two hundred. The Shepherd of Jesus' parable had one hundred sheep, and sought for the one lost,

in order to keep the *whole* number. Of course, he was moved by compassion toward the one lost sheep. Let us not forget that the number "one hundred" stands for a complete flock. Since the number "two" stands for confirmation, two hundred means "double flock." It is not only that each keeper will have a double work, but that each flock will be so trained that it will have the value of two.

At this point the Shulamite turns from the work to the Bridegroom Himself. Centering all her love on Him, she addresses her Beloved in these words: "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear."

The Shulamite has reached a degree of deeper humility by which she prizes others more than herself. She recognizes that while the Lord is interested in all individuals and in all places, yet He has special places where He goes, so to say, to rest and enjoy heartfelt fellowship. He dwelleth in the gardens, in places of modesty and fruitage, away from eyes of curiosity. He delights in humble and contrite spirits (Isaiah 57:15). There, He speaks intimate conversations. The Shulamite in deep humility describes herself out of this innermost fellowship; but entreats that she, too, hungers for intimate communion. "The companions," she says, "have superseded the teacher; they are more important than I. I am not worthy of them. They are gardens, and they not only hear, but hearken to Thy voice." She pleads: "Cause me to hear." As to say: "I would like, but am not able. Thou, oh Sovereign! grant me this, that from now on, I may be a real listener." She says no more, promising nothing, for she has reached that condition in which the mystics, though willing, promise nothing: though acknowledging responsibility for their actions, they depend entirely on pure grace; and, from now on, they will only be pleading: "Cause me—Cause me," as to say, "Force me."

We remember an Apostle who said: "He hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). This is not in the future, but portrays a condition of maturity where the saints recognize that mere guidance and assistance is not sufficient. Like a child who has done his best to walk on a hard road and has bleeding feet and is able no more to proceed, yet is determined to go ahead, not to stop—so, the Church asks the Lord that she must be taken in His arms and carried above the last mile of the way, for she is not able to finish her course. She pleads: " 'Cause me, ' translate me."

CHAPTER XXXIV

WAITING FOR HIS COMING

Song of Solomon 8:14

Several times, the word "return" has occurred in the Song of Solomon, an entreat of the Beloved to the Shulamite. Now it is the Shulamite who entreats Him to come back.

Peter speaks that the heavens have received Him and He will be there till He cometh. Of course, the Lord is present in the Spirit, but the Bride desires to meet Him in all His splendor, face to face. The last words of the book of Revelation contain a promise of His coming and an affectionate answer of John, who is a type of the Church: "Come, yes come Lord Jesus." But the time has not been set. The word "quickly" does not mean "soon" in sequence of events, but a sudden act when the coming occurs. Years and centuries may elapse, but when He will come, it will be like lightning. So it is each time that we expect some special visitation: answers are delayed but come, when matured, all at once.

The Shulamite is tired of staying away from Her Beloved, and she pleads with Him, not only for the return, but for an abbreviation of the absence. She does not say "return"; she is sure of the event, but is impatient of delay and

pleads: "Make haste my Beloved." The entreat covers also a promise which she makes, indirectly, in the name of all the Body. She knows that the delay of His coming is not due to lack of love but to the fact, that here below the preparations for receiving Him are incomplete. God has His own time which coincides with maturity of events.

When the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah reached their ultimate limit, the Lord descended in judgment. When the sins of Babylon—confusion—will have, topping one over the other, reached the last summit, the Lord will come in judgment. The same occurs in receiving graces: when the last prayer and sigh has reached its limit, the Lord descends to give special favors. There is a waiting in receiving favors and in seeing God's judgments. The Shulamite pleads: "Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices."

He will come—and quickly, but His feet must not this time touch the cursed earth, and He will not appear among crucifiers. What He will do after His first descend is not in our subject. There is a relation to all mankind and to the universe: we are, here, concerned with His return. He must step on "mountains of spices." "Spices" are small things, and it requires a quantity beyond imagination to make with them some large volume, much more to make a mountain, mountains. They seem almost insignificant in weight and volume; important, however, is their aroma.

In the realm of the Spirit, things are not measured with man's measures. God has His own methods. How large a quantity of spices are needed to make solid mountains it is impossible to calculate. But the Lord will give a special importance to spices which have been ground very finely. Their mass will be almost nothing, but the perfume will be intense and far-reaching.

Should we be occupied of seeing when the mountain is formed by our carrying spices, we would become dis-

heartened; but we are encouraged in the knowing that each time we groan in the spirit, shed a tear of penitence or of intercession, utter a word of adoration and praise—each time, we add something toward the formation of the mountains. The enemy and our own flesh will insinuate the words—"no use"; faith in the Lord and knowledge of at least some of His ways will cheer us with the message, "Go ahead; your sufferings, tears, adorations are not in vain." Then we will know, for sure, that, though no visible results appear, something real and permanent is being built. It is true that wicked actions when performed are no more in the controls of their actors; but it is also true that sufferings and devotions to Christ are each time gathered by His providence somewhere and kept in store to a special purpose.

The words of the Bride, upon the "mountains of spices," include also a prayer. Indirectly, they are a teaching to all the followers of the Shulamite. The Real Church stands between God and man; the Shulamite stands between her Beloved and the various groups. Raising her face heavenward, she pleads with the Lord: "Make haste my Beloved." Turning her face earthward, she pleads with the companions and followers: "Let us be busy to make mountains of spices. He deserves them. We do not want Him to step on an earthly carpet but to put His feet only on spices. Let us prepare them."

What a life! between two pleadings: heavenly and earthly. Each pleading seems independent of the other. "Make haste, my Beloved," and it seems she cannot promise anything. Turning to the Church, she says, "Let us make mountains of spices: with such work will we be occupied, for, concerning His return, He will surely come when the mountains have reached their ultimate summit."

In the beginning we observed that there is an unwritten history of the Shulamite before the events covered by

the Song of Solomon. In the end, to which we have arrived, we have to make the same confession: we are ignorant of the aftermath. Of course, she remained in the service of Her Beloved. We have to close this second part of our book with this portrait:

The Shulamite, mature by a long discipline of sufferings and love, stands like her crucified Lord who hung between earth and heaven. It is the life of intercession and mediation, to which the Church is called. It is the ministry of the interpreter of which is spoken in the book of Job. The Shulamite looks to heaven and speaks to her Beloved in a way as if He should in mercy expect nothing from men, because man can do nothing. Looking heavenward, she teaches, to those who study her look and words, absolute sovereignty of God—predestination. Looking earthward, she seems to say: "Do not doubt God's faithfulness; trust Him. You—we—are both responsible and must be occupied." She teaches free will and responsibility, and insists: "Let us make spices."

Oh! wisdom of God, only Thou knowest how to harmonize extremes and lead us into the immensity of Thy Grace which enables man to be filled with a desire to please Thee and to obey. We, too, say to our readers:

"Let us prepare spices."

AMEN

PART
THREE

The Transitory and The Permanent

CHAPTER XXXV

CHURCH RELATIONS

2 Corinthians 4:18

John 1:17

The Apostle Paul speaks of the things which we see as being temporal and of the things which we do not see as being eternal. Man is so attached to the visible that he seldom and scarcely pays any attention to the invisible. Now and then, a flash of revelation after disappointments in the material realm spurs him to look for something beyond the earthly senses.

John presents the contrast between the Mosaic and Christian dispensations in these words: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." A doubt could arise, that Moses did not give the truth, since we are informed that not by him but by Jesus the truth came. The answer is in the meaning we attach to the word "truth": if it is an affirmation opposed to falsehood; or if it refers to the things which remain and do not vanish. According to the first interpretation, Moses spoke the truth, for things happened exactly as he has written; in the second case, Moses did not give *the* truth, for all the provisions of that dispensation have been only for a time. Moreover,

the ordinances were only figures and shadows of the coming reality, which is only in Christ. From the two above passages—not to mention many others—we infer that there are two realms: the one of matter and transitoriness; and the other, not material but permanent.

We beg leave to use the word "matter" in the popular language, meaning something which could be examined by the physical senses. We do not ignore that beyond the physical realm, there is still matter which can be examined by superior senses.

Christ stands between two worlds; and the Invisible Church stands, now, as Jesus' representative, also between two worlds. Like He always endeavored to lead His disciples from the things of this world to the things above, so the Church tries to lead others from the various cults and religious attempts to the absolute truth, which is absolute reality.

Since the disciple is not above the Master, the Church faces, in a measure, the same oppositions which confronted the Leader. People branded Jesus as a demoniac or insane. The religionists of His days were fixed in their crystallized creeds and could not—old worn skins as they were—receive the new wine. The religionists of today oppose the Church for the same reason. Many call Jesus a deceiver. Not a few will brand the Church with the same appellation. Many, using a rather moderate language, will call her a "dreamer." To which appellation we would like to give the answer of a great mystic who so replied, (I quote from memory): "Call the things you judge practical and real, to be a dream; and the things you sneer at as unpractical and vaporous, reality—the only reality."

The opposition to Jesus did not remain the same by all men. Some were shaken and invited to reality, even from the Cross. The earthquake shook the audacity of many, and revealed a conviction in the heart of a heathen officer.

The cry of the centurion, that Jesus is really the Son of God, is prophetic of what will happen and did happen in many who began and will begin to realize that Christ and His kingdom are the only things which remain permanent. Above the amount of all the human knowledge and contradictory philosophies, towering more and more clear and majestic, stands the affirmation of Jesus: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Such an affirmation, at the time it was uttered, seemed a dream; but the conflicts of centuries and the need of many hearts who look only to Jesus for the solution of chaotic problems begin to teach that what seemed a dream or empty boasting, at the time, is a reality. Likewise, the massive temple of Jerusalem seemed even to the disciples to defy decay or destruction; but history has proven that the temple has gone and Christ's words remain. The Roman Empire, symbolized in its strength and discipline by a mighty emperor, Julian, has passed away and had to confess its inability to blot out the name of Christ. True or legendary, the words of the dying emperor, "Galilean, thou hast conquered," are a message that the only thing worthwhile to accept and receive is Christ and His message.

Our theme is not "The Christ" but "The Invisible Church." Yet, we have to return to Him to see that the Church has to stand and overcome the same oppositions. She has to deal with the world, with the powers of the world, and with the various religions. The Church is in the world, but not of the world. She cannot be enemy to anyone, although she has enemies. She is not accepted at large by the world and by religionists, but she will, now and then, be acknowledged and followed by some. Like Christ, who is a refuge to those who are shipwrecked in the things of life, so the Invisible Church opens her arms to receive the disappointed of wordly and religious systems. Meantime, she has to suffer from every quarter; but also she is

instructed by her Leader, as to how to move and act in the midst of conflicts and oppositions. We will touch, by His Grace, on a few points:

What is her relation to the world?

What is her relation to the powers of the world?

What is her relation to the various religions and, especially, to Christian churches?

To avoid confusion, let us explain, that the word "church" has two meanings in the theological sense: the Body of the Elect; and the various congregations which all go under the name of Christianity. May the Lord help us to be faithful to our subject, without becoming uncharitable and unfair to the various opposers of the Invisible Church.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

Philippians 4:5

1 John 2:15-17

We are tired of the declamations from Christian pulpits and testimonies against this poor world. We use the word "Christian" and "world" in the vernacular. We need to know what "world" means in the religious sense. It is not the outsiders of church buildings, nor the unsubscribers to any of the many creeds; but it is something else. The word in Greek refers to "order," "arrangement"; and is understood according to the human mind.

Going back to the history of the Fall, we find that there were three causes of the sin of the first human being: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Going back to the earliest record, we read: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eye, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Genesis 3:6). The three lusts, mentioned by the Apostle John were present in Eve's actions. The consequence of that sin was double: the hiding before God with a covering of fig leaves; and the lack of penitence, by which the un-

happy pair began to accuse others, which accusation, in reality, meant to accuse God, for He had created the serpent and the trees in the garden.

This, then, is the world: the summing up of man's lusts and excuses and accusations to the creatures and to the Creator. The mistake of churches is in calling "world" the outsiders of their congregations, and not the complexities of lusts and schemes which afflict, for a long time, even the best Christians. Yet, we desire to use the "world" in the popular sense, of outsiders to religious congregations, especially, Christian congregations, and ask ourselves: What must be the relation of the Invisible Church to the world?

No need to say that her standing against the wiles of the spirit of the world is in obeying the command: "Walk in the Spirit." But what about those who "walk in the Spirit" and have to deal, not only with those who call themselves Christians and do not walk in the Spirit, but those who do not care at all for any Christian denomination?

St. Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." The word "moderation" is also translated "gentleness," "forbearance," "consideration." Its richness includes all these qualities. We illustrate the word "consideration," which bespeaks that, deep in our hearts and minds, we must enter in the condition of those with whom we are dealing, putting ourselves in their places, imagining what we would do in the same circumstances, sicknesses, complexities, and handicaps. In considering others, we might see evil in the exterior, but we would not judge evil in their souls. We lack the ultimate evidence of the cause of evil in individuals, for this knowledge is taken away from man and is reserved only to the Creator. Consequently, we cannot judge people, although we should not approve any act of weakness. We should marvel at nothing, never considering ourselves above the failures and temptations of others. Rather, we

should identify ourselves with all the shortcomings and sins of all mankind. We, too, are in the proper sense, each one of us, a "son of man," which means, at one with the Adamic nature. We are what we are by the Grace of God and not by any of our merits.

The consideration of our earthly common lot, the appreciation of God's Grace which makes us debtors to God and humanity creates in the members of the Invisible Church a certain universal pity by which they feel more to weep over the sins of others than to raise their voice in condemnation. Their attitude while they move among vanities and weaknesses seems to say: "We are not better than you; rather we are weaker; we, too, have failed and could fail grievously. We do have the same allurements you have. The only difference is that the Lord has been merciful to us; He has changed us, not we ourselves. He will change you, too."

Not that the members of the Church should go saying these words, but that their carriage and mien must say so much and more. Considering God's Grace and man's inner depravity, the Invisible Church will approach individuals everywhere with a spirit of meekness, gentleness, forbearance. It is the silent Gospel, preached to the outsiders.

There is in the history of the martyrs a record of a holy man taken to the stake to be burned, who, in seeing some old women mocking with ferocious screams while gathering fagots for the pyre, he turned to them with a look of pity, and uttered prayers for them. Often the attitude of the martyrs have melted even the hearts of some of the executioners. All depends on *consideration*. Alas! we remember when we, too, have been almost cruel in our blind zeal, imagining we were advancing Christ's cause.

The same Apostle writes to Timothy, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks be made for all men (1 Timothy 1:8). Let us not pass lightly on these recom-

mendations. It is impossible to love all men without being controlled by God's love. It is impossible to supplicate, to pray, to intercede for all; and it is absolutely above human capacity to return thanks to God for the prosperity of our enemies. We scarcely rejoice in the prosperity of our friends; how can we in that of the outsiders, some of which may be even trying to hinder our service to the Lord? The answer is in that song, "Oh Love of God," where, in the last stanza, is a reproduction of words found scribbled in pencil in the cell of an insane after he had died: words which speak of the Love of God, whose description would never end, although men would dry the ocean if it were full of ink, and would exhaust all papers even if the immense sky were all a parchment. Absurd comparison is this; yes, but not more absurd than to pray and give thanks for all men. Only God in us can do that.

The Apostle continues that it is God's Will, that He wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. It is not in our department to speak of the final destiny, but we insist on the Will of God; and this Will possesses also the real members of the Invisible Church. The Apostle did protest that he was speaking truth. Such expostulation reveals that the accepting of the immensity of the Love of God for all creatures is distasteful to sectarians, and such a truth is accepted only by those who identify themselves with the Love of God. The same Apostle concludes the exhortation by saying, that man—he means Christians—should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.

John, who is called the Apostle of love, although all the Apostles preached love, sums up salvation in one word—LOVE. Not only love to God, not even love to man; but to God, man, and all creation. He says that who loves God loves also whomsoever and whatsoever comes from God Himself. It would be a mockery of love to say that we love

an artist and in the same time despise his work. So it is in our relation with God. This is the reason why in the book of Revelation, the last writings of the Bible on opening God's heart in Christ, there is so much said about "creator," "creation," "creatures." Oh! Love of God, which made some saints cherish even inanimate objects and wild beasts.

This, then, is the attitude of the Invisible Church to the outsiders: she looks on all with tenderness as she would say: "Oh creatures! you need to know God's love. I am trying to become to you like a refuge from your storms of life, above creeds and sects." Like Jesus, she would say, without speaking: "Come unto me." It is Christ who invites, and it is the Church who echoes the invitation.

Results! Let the Church look for no known results in the realm of time; let her be firm and fearless that nothing is lost which is done in the Name of Christ.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE INVISIBLE CHURCH AND THE POWERS OF THE WORLD

Luke 7:8

That the Church should enter the conflict with the powers of the world is clear from one of the temptations in the wilderness, from the invitation of satan to Jesus Christ, that He should have at His command the kingdoms of the world and their glory, on condition that He would fall and worship him, satan. Jesus' sharp answer teaches that we must worship and adore God alone. It was a solicitation to compromise between the invisible power of God and the actual powers which dominate the world. That there are powers which control many things is undeniable also from what is written in Ephesians 6:10-20. Of course, all is under God's sovereignty; but we must consider the relation of the Church to these earthly powers. Some questions present themselves:

Shall the Church ask the protection of the worldly potentates?

Shall she obey them always and in everything?

What should be her attitude in the face of opposition?

Weighty questions are these, which have confused the minds of many, and which can be answered, though only in

part, if we go back to the fountainhead and consider what was the attitude of the Apostles and, especially, of Jesus Christ toward the governments of this world.

The centurion sent a message to Jesus, stating that he—the centurion—was a man set under authority and had under him soldiers whom he could command. Consequently, there is no absolute authority in anyone, for ultimately all powers must be submitted to the one Power who is in God. In conclusion, *all power* belongs to God. Stating the problem on broad lines, we can affirm that we should always obey the earthly powers when that obedience does not infringe with our allegiance and devotion to the sovereign power of God. But these statements require some practical observations.

Many recommend that the Church should ask for recognition from the world, because the Apostle Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship; and because, in order to have free entrance and protection in the mission field, legal documents are needed; and also because the Lord Himself has ordered that we reverence the authority. The observations of the visible church are subtle; and only a deep devotion to the Lord can answer them and detect their fallacy. It is easy to find an excuse for everything when we are decided to go with the current of the world. We have seen preachers who were pacifists in time of peace and warmongers in time of war—always trying to apply verses of the scripture to support their point of view. We see the churches and the world, walking arm and arm; but we cannot evade the high principles of Christianity: we have to face the situation.

Jesus stated clearly that only by the Holy Spirit, and not by human intellect or means, was He recognized by Peter to be the Son of the Living God and the Christ. In various modes, He warned that the world would hate the disciples, because the world hated Him. Jesus said that He would always be with them to the end of the age, and

that in critical hours they would be taught from above how to act and how to answer. He spoke that they would be persecuted from one city into another, but hinted that they would always find some other place. It is not needed to think only of geographical places, for changes of conditions are implied, by which they would always be serving the Lord, even if cast out of places.

Let us begin with few observations in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul had been bound and was about to be beaten: he appealed to the law, by which a Roman citizen could not be bound and beaten without having been first examined. It was a common case of law, without any reference to the Christian truth. In fact, no Roman magistrate ever decided that he—Paul—was in the truth concerning Christ. The only point was if he had committed any crime while preaching that truth. The Roman authorities did not intrude in theological questions.

When the preaching of the Apostles had stirred the animosity of the priesthood by announcing Jesus' resurrection, they—the Apostles—were brought before the Jewish authority and were commanded not to preach anymore in Jesus' Name. We know the answer of Peter; it was full of respect to the authority, but adamant to the divine commission: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." These words reveal respect for the magistrates, to whom they appealed, "Judge ye"; and a respect to God's authority in the words, "We cannot but speak . . ."

What passport? what license to preach did Peter and John ask? Commanded not to speak, they kept on preaching. True, there was a price; they were beaten, imprisoned; but they remained faithful to the divine commission.

We hear many times, that we cannot go into a missionary field unless we are well-organized and recognized

by earthly powers. This means, then, that these powers have to decide if we are in the right or in the wrong. But Jesus Christ stated that the truth of Christianity can be understood only by revelation from above. But we ask a few questions:

Is it necessary that we trek the world as missionaries and reverends?

Was Christianity spread through people who travelled under worldly protection or by men and women, who unrecognized as Christ's servants, underwent even martyrdom for the truth?

Did not some, working as slaves in the mines, testify of Christ as much and wherever they could?

Did not the Apostle Paul testify to the soldiers who kept the watch, so that there were Christians even in the household of Nero? Did not the same Apostle preach in Philippi and then was beaten and afterwards expelled from the city? Did he ask any license to preach from any authority?

However, the visible church says that we cannot go unless we are recognized as official preachers. But who commands that we must go as "official preachers"? And are we sure that the Lord sends us? Who did send Philip into the desert? what means of travelling were prepared for him? who transported him to distant parts after the treasurer had been baptized? Did Paul go to Rome as an official missionary, or he went there as a prisoner?

If we need a document to travel we may ask for it, simply stating our object: the authority has the right to know if we are honest people and can support ourselves, but has no right to investigate if we are the official representatives of Christianity. These representatives who pretend to direct Christ's work have already compromised, and have set limits and creeds to the truth of Christ. To be

recognized by such, means the cramping of our light and the limiting of the spirit of revelation. But to proceed:

We cannot give a better conclusion to our subject than by looking to Jesus Christ. No man did ever stir so much opposition as He, but no one could hinder His ministry before His journey was ended. They tried several times to kill Him but did not succeed. They once sent sergeants to arrest Him, but these, enthralled by His speech, forgot their errand and returned without the prisoner, relating that no man ever had spoken as He—Jesus.

Jesus was taken before two authorities: the religious Jewish authority and the Roman. In the presence of both, He has left the example of how we must deal with authorities. He answered Caiaphas, until Caiaphas rent his own clothing. He answered Pilate with respect and firmness, but also told him that he was responsible for the way he acted as judge. Jesus Christ did not present any document, nor appealed to any privileges. When Pilate, terrified at the words, "Son of God," asked Him whence He was, Jesus remained silent; whereas by confirming that He is the Son of God, He would have received protection. Jesus appeared before the earthly magistrate without protection or recommendation, for He identified Himself with humanity. It is true that He paid the money of tribute to the temple, according to the Mosaic law. He did that, not to be a stumbling block to the religionists of His day who had not the revelation that He was the Son of God; but that act did not mean any compromise, or a conflict between obedience to two powers.

Much effectual work in Christianity has been carried on by obscure and unrecognized laborers. The names of such are known only in heaven. God knows when to restrain persecutions, or make even civil authorities become our protectors. In the city of Ephesus, in the uproar of the silversmiths, the civil authority protected the Christians with-

out their appealing to any privilege. And, to recall an old event, when Saul had almost encircled the mountain and had almost captured David, God protected David by the arrival of a messenger to Saul, that the Philistines were invading the land. Saul was forced to stop pursuing David.

God will direct the Invisible Church, step by step, and will fulfill His plan in the face of men's oppositions. No need to observe what is well known, that the "so-called" conversion and the protection of the Emperor Constantine was not a progress but a compromise in Christianity.

God, in His condescension, permits things, but it cannot be denied that, here and there, like "salt" and "light," stand firm a few souls who will not compromise and who know, in the school of Christ, how to reverence authority of man and at the same time proclaim the truth of Christ.

"Most excellent Festus," said the aged prisoner Paul to the Roman governor. It was a word of respect to the authority. "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" challenged the same Apostle to a man on whose good will could depend his liberation.

In the school of Christ, we learn perfect equilibrium, how to proceed between the world and its powers, and God's sovereignty and His commissions. But to so live and serve Christ may mean martyrdom. Yes, it leads to martyrdom. But of this later.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES

Matthew 16:18

The word "church" has three meanings: one refers to a political or social group, as used in Greek history when speaking of the *Ecclesia*, a government body in the cities: this "church" is out of our theme. The other two meanings are in the religious language. There is *The Church* and the churches. Jesus Christ promised He would build His Church. The New Testament, besides the word "church" in the singular, has many times repeated the word "churches." The meaning is "local congregations."

In the speaking of the Church and the churches, we must avoid extremes, of either seeing the plan of God for the Church in local churches, or despising altogether the various groups and denominations. In the first case, we have a sect of arrogant people who call themselves the real Body of Christ and brand all others as heretics; in the latter, we have a spirit of compromise which would almost get away from the plan of God and make Christianity only a social, ethical society. To steer between these two rocks is our desire. The Church of Christ neither despises others, nor sells herself to them.

It is out of our scope to touch on the relation of the various religions outside of Christianity. Enough to say that a genuine Christian learns to see some good everywhere and, in approaching people, avoids proselyting, yet remains faithful to the commission of witnessing to all concerning Jesus Christ. This subject would bring us too far from our theme; yet a word is due on avoiding proselyting and, in the same time, not to miss occasions of speaking of Jesus Christ whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. This, however, may form the material of a separate study. Let us proceed:

The problem of the Invisible Church—how to deal with the churches—is a delicate one, requiring charity with truth, wisdom with understanding. One thing it is to speak of Christ to those who never heard or accepted Him, and another to approach those who call themselves Christians; and also those that are Christians but remain in a state of childhood. These latter are in a danger either of crystallizing themselves in fixed creeds, rejecting any new revelation in the word, or to rush headlong to any new doctrine and movement.

If an outsider approaches Christianity, he will be appalled at the number of sects, often excommunicating one another: each one pretending to possess the monopoly of the truth. It is fair to state that the large denominations of today do not excommunicate each other. This, however, should not be accepted with much optimism. Man loses something of his fighting spirit because he enters, more and more, the realm of justice, appreciating others more and thinking less of self. This is noble; yet, in most cases, the fighting spirit abates because man becomes disappointed and loses his former enthusiasm. Alas! the "so-called" tolerance of which we hear among the large denominations is, we fear, due mostly to the lack of primitive interest and zeal. There is an unspoken, "We do not care. Why quarrel?"

Every religious movement was born of a need to emphasize some neglected part of the Truth. After a lapse of time, every movement, seen as an entity, degenerates. Three elements are noticeable: those who are false or violent and are in every enterprise, like the tares among the wheat and the strange children who mingled with the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt. Of this section, there is no need to comment. Another group, tired of being persecuted, entering a certain stage of human prudence, adapts itself to conditions, fixes creeds, and organizes, imagining that it is always faithful to the principles which started the movement. In reality this group keeps of the initial movement only the name. Little by little, the saintly pioneers who started a noble work become dead history. The movement, becoming a respected denomination, is one of the churches, possessing some of Christianity and much of social enterprises.

There is a third part, very small in number, who are neither violent nor static, and see that the movement was only the beginning of an ascending progress in the realm of truth. These, too, are prudent, but of a divine prudence. They see the dangers by which the conservative part felt the force of adapting in order to live: they see the dangers but trust that God—and not human prudence—should lead in the encounter of new emergencies. This group, we repeat, is rather small; they are the discontented in every movement. They prize the principles and are determined not to stop but to go ahead with the Lord.

Jesus promised that He had many things to say which the disciples were not capable to understand at that time. He also spoke of a coming revelation from the Father, and that someday, He would no more speak in figures—yes, even the letter—but openly of the Father. It is promised that the Will of God and His word will someday be written in the mind, engraved in the heart. It is promised a

new grace at each revelation—apocalypse of Jesus Christ. There is a warning that God will shake, more and more, not only the earth but also the heaven. Many other things are written which warn not to fix anywhere, but to remain like pilgrims, ready to move at any bidding of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the few of the last group feel that they should not tie themselves to anything permanent. Living among changing things and events, they always look to the unchangeable Christ.

The majority of Christians want to enjoy peace—human peace; but there is only one way to have things static: it is by fixing the movement in creeds and place it under legal protection; consequently, the vote of a majority is needed: buildings must remain in the property of the denomination; preaching and teaching must go according to prearranged lines. Also a certain liberalism is allowed which leads to a diluted Christianity. The denomination keeps its world respectability, is untroubled; but loses, little by little, the divine vigor by which a movement is kept always in a state of fermentation. They repeat: "We need peace; we need order." They get peace, which is a lack of disturbances, but not God's peace; and they also get human order and discipline.

Anyone who understands the great principles of Christianity realizes that new wine never stops fermenting, that the Truth cannot be crystallized in creeds, that the Lord spoke and speaks. Consequently, we will never enter a realm of "so-called" peace and order. Peace, order there are, but according to God's ways which often are like agitations to man: peace among storms; rest in the midst of unrest, for in the world the real Christian has no abiding city and not a place where he can lay his head. He is a soldier, always ready to keep going. Peace, rest, refuge is only in Christ.

The few ones are the Invisible Church. They do not join any sect. Many times they remain long, though sighing, in the same congregations. Their presence, even in their silence, has a restraining power in those who would go too far. They remain where they are and keep praying to obey God's Will whenever He wants anything from them, or that they should move on. They well know that Jesus never corrected or began anything before His time. Yet, the time comes when they—one here, one there—are almost put out of the assemblies. Then they either find some new companions of *exile*, or remain alone: in both cases they bear the brand of malediction or at least the sneer of being considered extremists and fanatics.

Extremists and fanatics there are. But genuine Christians do not move rashly; they tremble at novelties and diligently search God's Will before attempting anything. They are optimists and pessimists at the same time; conservative and progressive; retired and yet ready to show themselves; gentle and yet severe. They present a picture of contradictions, so resembling the One who can be defined: The Synthesis of all antithesis—Jesus Christ our Lord.

These few ones do not go around criticizing or saying to the frequenters of other groups: "Come to us." Rather, they say to the members of the various confessions: "Stay where you are, as long as you feel at home in that place." They do not speak of churches, but are ready to acknowledge any good which is to be found anywhere. They warn the discontented ones, that there is no perfect church under the sun. They speak of Jesus' faithfulness and unchangeableness. They point people to Him, not to themselves or to any man. But, whereas they are averse to running after people, they are openhearted and ready to receive all those whom the Lord sends to them. They open their arms to the defeated and discontented who have a thirst toward the Infinite. Not allied to any church, they show tenderness to

all and are a "hospital" which accepts in its bosom the spiritually crippled.

I once visited a large temple and noticed an immense crowd. The enthusiasm was great; the activities in it were manifold. A large choir of men in one wing and of the same number of women in the other. A rich orchestra; a popular preacher on the platform and many companions near him—all was imposing; but I felt like a stranger. Accustomed to a long discipline, accusing myself for not feeling the enthusiasm of that mass of people and their leaders, in a spirit of penitence, I began to pray, asking forgiveness for what I considered lack of charity in me. I was almost in tears, being a self-accuser, considering myself a faultfinder. But the gentle *Voice* spoke to me, saying: "Be patient my child! I am almost a stranger in this place. There is much of churchism and a little of Me; but there is also some 'grain.' I appreciate even little things. Imitate Me. Consider this place as a concourse of people in a large railroad station: very few board the trains; the majority there are not travelling. From this concourse, comparatively few will really come to Me; not soon but one by one. I know My own."

The Lord kept speaking to me, and I was quieted and began to look on the place, on the mass of people, on the various leaders with love and tenderness. Of course, far it be to presume that I was the only one to have the above experience. Possibly in that same crowd, there were several who felt as I did and were comforted and instructed in like manner. Oh! to be faithful to the ideal of Christ and gentle, full of charity in everything, everywhere, to every creature and creation. It reminds us of the parable of the treasure in the field. The one who had bought the field had no need of it, but made the purchase in order to hide in it the treasure.

Let us love the churches. There is much good in them, although mixed with strange mixtures. In them are hidden "jewels" whom the Lord keeps hidden. While unattached to any confession, let each member of the Invisible Church remain where he is until the Lord commands otherwise. The day will come that he will follow His Lord out of Jerusalem to the place of the *skull*—the crucifixion of the mind.

When will each member know that he must go out? Out, he is already in the Spirit. But when will he go out in the body? Perhaps he must die there; perhaps not; only God knows. The important thing is for him to know that he belongs to the heavenly Jerusalem. Will he know this? When? How? Of this, God helping us, we will consider later.

CHAPTER XXXIX

UPWARD—DOWNWARD—ROUNDAABOUT LOOK

There are heights of revelation impossible to be seen even by the majority of Christians and are slowly apprehended by those who with perseverance exercise themselves in the Invisible Realm until the things above become a reality, while the others only shadows and figures. Yet, many have the seed of the Truth in themselves, waiting God's time for the proper development. For this reason the Invisible Church, while steadily progressing, becomes more and more lenient, knowing that God will, in His proper way and time, ripen each grain before the ingathering. Clear understanding of God's heart and patience makes a Christian of a forgiving and compassionate spirit. Little by little, the members of the Church forget their own needs, rather they have no needs; but they enter in the plan of the Lord and make God's plan and humanity's needs their hope.

Let us remember the words of the Lord in John 16:23. "In that day, ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name He will give it you." In the day when the man child will have been born through anguish, in that day a new beginning. Each becomes, so to say, a double individual: one is caught up to the throne; and another remains, a pilgrim in

the wilderness of this world. But of this duality of life we will write later. In that day selfish, self-centered prayers will be over; and yet, just then one begins to appeal to the Father in Jesus' Name.

To the Father: The primary aim of Jesus has been to reveal the Father. To pray in Jesus' Name means that it is He Himself who prays through us—viz., we enter Christ's interest and ask the same things He would ask.

The Lord lived His earthly life between three looks: upward, downward, and roundabout.

Upward. Jesus depended on the Father, step by step, in His speeches and conversations. Amidst many conflicts, He drew comfort only from above, so the Church. The letter does not state, at least not clearly, that His plan of Redemption involved more than a single grace, or only the Church, nor even this planet alone. This thought was taken up through revelation by St. Paul who wrote: "And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, whether things in earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20). The horizon of Christ's work widens, and so widens, too, the outlook of the Invisible Church.

Downward. No one can read the life of Jesus without noticing the two extremes of *up* and *down*. From the Mount of Transfiguration, where the enthralled disciples would have preferred to remain in an ecstatic contemplation, He came down to the valley to face a motley crowd of common people—disciples and scribes. At the foot of the mount was a poor man who had brought to Jesus his sick boy; there, also, was the quarreling of the scribes with the simple disciples, which ended in confusion and despair. Jesus met the situation. He never remained long in any place, and passed abruptly from one extreme to another. The *up* and *down* in His outlook were so entwined that no one could foresee what He would do next.

Not only was there the upward and downward look but also the roundabout. It seems that He looked distant to a mass of people who would come from distant parts in His Kingdom. One of His statements is: "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

Theologians, in general, have tried to tone down the immensity of the above statement, applying it only to Judaism and to the Church. It applies, but extends itself distant, to many people who never knew anything of Moses and who do not care to enter any of the Christian churches. Those who have traveled much have observed people who are strangers to churches, but not to the Blessed Name of Jesus. It is true that many mention Him only to strengthen some sect to which they belong and which is outside of the orthodox church. But there are also many who love and mention Jesus for the attraction they feel to Himself, without reference to any group whatsoever. We will have many surprises in heaven, in meeting people whom, many times in our blind zeal, we have branded as agnostics or infidels. The Invisible Church understands, more and more, the vastity of Jesus' problem. We hear the echo of the comforting words in Isaiah 54. Please read the full chapter. Note that it speaks of a desolate woman who was barren and to whom children are promised in abundance. She also is commanded to enlarge the place of her tent, for she will break forth on the right hand and on the left; and someday she will see many people coming to her of whom she never dreamt. This thought is also from other portions of the same prophet.

Of course, the desolate woman is the Invisible Church who, in the opinion of proselyting Christians, seems an idle and an unfruitful dreamer. But it is this same woman who

enters in the spirit of her Beloved and sees a crowd from a distant when nothing visible appears in the horizon.

In Colossians 1:23 is a statement which in the letter seems untrue. It reads: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, which was preached to every creature [creation], which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." Did Paul go everywhere and speak to every creature? yea to every creation? Only one answer: It is the ministry in the spirit—the reaching out of the utmost needs, places, people, making our desires and prayers travel while the body remains in one place.

As the high priest in the Old Testament had assistants, so, too, the new High Priest, Jesus, has assistants. The high priest communed with God in the innermost sanctuary and then blessed the people. The new High Priest and the Church through Him also commune in the sanctuary and also bless mankind and all creation. Jesus lives to intercede, so the Church.

It is not out of place to remark here that one of the greatest afflictions of the Lord is when He is limited in His expansion by our little faith, so that He cannot pour or enlarge Himself in us. The ocean of His love craves to pour Himself, more and more, in others. The more unworthy one feels in himself, the more gracious and bold he must be, for Grace is appreciated most where the need is greatest.

Upward, downward. The one who rules the starry heavens condescends to care even for the smallest things. A little bird, a blade of grass are in His providence just the same as an immense sun, shining in sidereal spaces. The Church follows the Lord in this highest and lowest. To conclude, we take two instances: one from the book of Nehemiah; and the other from the last chapter of Revelation.

Nehemiah was prospering as a cupbearer in the court of the king of Persia; but was not indifferent to the distresses of the people in Judea. One day, someone reported to him: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." When the elegant courtier heard this sad report, he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. He identified himself with the sin of his people and with their needs. He asked the Lord that he might find grace with his earthly sovereign. He was not accustomed to appear with a sad face before the king; but, after what he had heard, he could not help but carry the imprint of a deep sorrow. The king asked him: "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?" It was an ominous question, for earthly potentates are suspicious. Nehemiah was "sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" As to say: "Can I enjoy my prosperity, knowing the distresses of others?" We add: Can the most blessed saint enjoy his privileges when others are in need? To continue:

The king asked him what was his request. Nehemiah asked to be sent unto Judah, unto the city of his fathers' sepulchres, that he might build it. Permission was granted. The historian adds: "The queen also, sitting by him [the king]." This remark makes us think that Jesus, the King, acts in accord with the Church, His Bride. Nehemiah, too, is a type of the Church, for he had a look to the king and a "spirit-look" to the distresses of others.

Revelation 22:17 reads: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come." This is the last invitation of the book. Throughout its pages there is a growing revelation of Jesus and the real Church. Now it is the Church led by

the Spirit, or better, joined with the Spirit, who takes on herself the burden and the great liberty of extending invitations in the name of her Lord. It seems that she has an *upward, downward, and a roundabout* look. "Come," she says; and the needy ones, the thirsty ones are encouraged to come. "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." We have here a vivid picture of a court where the majestic king, out of extreme gentleness, retires for a moment, and the queen alone appears. The Spirit, of course, is invisible. Only the woman is seen on the last stage of extending invitations. As to temper with the gentleness of divine womanhood and not to dazzle people with too much glory, she says the last word: *Come*. Her interest have merged all in all with Christ whom she represents; and with the need of others to which she extends a tender invitation. She lives between two: her Bridegroom and all those who have come to Him.

Oneness is in this woman, with God and with the universe.

PART
FOUR

The Formation of the Invisible Church

CHAPTER XL

HER WORK AND CITIZENSHIP

Isaiah 53:1

Luke 2

Malachi 3

Isaiah 17:6

Amos 3:12

Isaiah informs that God *created* Jacob and *formed* Israel. There is then a mass of people who are "Jacob" and some who are "Israel." Jacob, of course, is expected to be made Israel, if he will accept what happened to the patriarch in the night of Penue! Many years had he been Jacob, a supplanter, although he had a divine destiny. But in that eventful night he had to yield, stop arguing, and had to become "prince" of the Lord—a new beginning in his life. "Jacob" is a type of many people; "Israel," of a few.

No need to insist on the warning of Jesus, not to proselyte (Matthew 23:15). Proselyting creates sects. The Invisible Church has stopped proselyting forever. The Lord is separating her from a mass of people who, in turn, have been in the past also separated from larger crowds. It is a continuous separation and reduction from large to small numbers.

In Isaiah 17:6 we read: "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries

in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof." Only a remnant.

The prophet Amos has a pitiful picture (Amos 3:12): "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch." No time to detail on this verse, though we note the places and conditions in which are found the ones who are reserved. The sheep to which the verse alludes is not an individual but represents a class of people, all devoured by the enemy, except for a few pieces of that mangled body: legs to walk, ear to listen. The rest have been mangled or devoured. The picture applies to a group of people and to each individual. In many of us, after many storms and defeats, remain only "legs" and one "ear,"—walk and listen. From this will commence a new beginning.

To illustrate the process of reduction from numbers to small numbers, we turn to two passages in the scriptures. Luke 2:40-52 describes the incident of Jesus' remaining in the temple while Joseph and Mary travelled towards Galilee. The crowd which had gone to Jerusalem for the feast was a religious gathering who had left other people behind in order to be present at the Passover. In this mass of people were Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, for a time. When the feast was over, Providence had designed a new beginning. Joseph and Mary were not ready to miss the big company; they did not care to ascertain if the boy Jesus had left the city with them. Not a thought crossed their minds, that He would separate Himself and remain in the temple. If we should read in the subconsciousness of the two saints an answer to our question, they would reply: "What a demand! We came together; we go all together. Let us not abandon our assembly. The boy, of course, will return in company just as we arrived in company." But different was God's

plan. Mary and Joseph travelled a full day, always *supposing* Jesus to be in the crowd. At nightfall they discovered that He was not. They sought from group to group but found Him not. It is always at some critical junction in life that we discover our real condition; and we are invited to a new start.

What had happened led the dear people—Joseph and Mary—to a separation. They had to choose between the religious crowd, or to go back to Jerusalem in search of the Divine Boy. They chose the second alternative, and did well. The crowd, indifferent to the Boy and even to the disappearance of the two pilgrims, proceeded happily and satisfied toward their home. It is not out of place to imagine that during the trip, they refreshed themselves with some singing and scriptural conversations. Jesus was not with them, and they had no need for Him either.

The two pilgrims, weary and distressed, returned to the city and continued in their mistake, looking for the Boy everywhere except where He could be found. Of this, we have written elsewhere: so we hasten to conclude, that they found Him, and *in three* resumed their journey toward Galilee and Nazareth. The company of that Boy was more to them than all the crowds of the universe. We do not qualify that crowd: it is a question of the stature one has reached and the light received. For the present, they—the great number—were the visible church; the obscure three people were the Invisible Church.

A new lesson.

We have to go back to the last book of the Old Testament—Malachi. It is a picture of a religious, self-satisfied people. Seemingly, they enjoyed a certain prosperity. To the reprimands of the prophet, they answered in a careless manner:

“Why do we deal treacherously?

“Wherefore?

"Wherein have we wearied in?

"Wherein have we robbed Him?

"Wherein shall we return?

"What have we spoken against Him?"

To each charge, they had a careless answer, almost in a sneer.

No killing of prophets, no persecutions, but only indifference. They showed what might have been termed "a liberal spirit." That tolerance, in this case, was indifference or apostasy. Tolerance with individuals we must have, but we must be strict and clear in our ideals. Yet, not all were in the above conditions. There was a remnant. So the prophet (Malachi 3:16, 17): "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that *feared* the Lord, and that *thought* upon His Name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth Him."

This passage presents the real organization, for the Invisible Church is organized too, but in a mode different than the visible church. A few individuals scattered, here and there, *feared the Lord and thought upon His Name*. "Name" in the Old Testament is a prophetic word, referring to the Son of God. These individuals did not stop at merely fearing God. Such a thing is necessary, but is not everything, for the fear of God is only the beginning of wisdom. Job had the fear of God; consequently, the beginning of wisdom. Yet, Elihu exhorted him to listen and he would gain wisdom, which, indeed, Job attained in the end. To proceed:

The remnant of Malachi's book did not only fear God, but had their minds concentrated on the *Name*. It is the positive condition of those who intensely love Jesus. We think according to what we have in our hearts. They did not enter any accord among themselves, before reaching

that stage of "fearing" and "thinking." When they were in that blessed condition, each one began to desire to find some congenial companion. By the law of attraction, manifested in "spirit-vibrations," one here, one there discovered some who were possessed of the same ideals and began to seek each other and to converse. Often, they spoke one to another, for the merciful Lord knows that we need some human comfort which is to be found only among congenial spirits.

Nothing in the visible did appear to the outsiders. Religious crowds continued as before. The few ones did not organize anything in the ecclesiastical sense; they only comforted one another, as much as they could, whenever possible. However, while nothing did transpire on earth, much was done in heaven: a book was written. We do not need to think of a material book as in a library; rather, we affirm that they were listed as an assembly in heaven, as a part of the universal assembly. The Lord called them "jewels." Jewels are not shown to everyone or kept for any common use, but are saved in a secure place, to be taken out only on special occasions. These obscure,—and we imagined, despised and sneered people did not appear to others what they really were in God's sight; but they were "jewels." The Lord promised that he would spare them. From what we know of other teachings, the "sparing" refers more to the higher, which is really the only real life.

Someday in the King's court, these jewels will be manifested. Meanwhile, let them be patient and not be aggravated by accusations of others, or temptations, or disheartening spirits. Let them look to the Beyond and not to what is temporary and earthly. So the prophet concludes: "Then shall ye return [a continuous coming nearer and nearer to the Lord], and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. . . . Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of

righteousness arise with healing in his wings [a word, conveying light and power]; and ye shall go forth [proceed in your work], and grow up [happy] as calves of the stall."

There is a promise of a special messenger: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." There was Elijah in the person of John the Baptist before Jesus began His ministry. There is Elijah—a powerful ministry of authority and divine fire, independent and fearless of men—in and through the Invisible Church.

CHAPTER XLI

DECISIVE CRISIS

Judges 7:5-7
Esther 4:14

2 Samuel 19:22
1 Kings 3:16-28

Earthly wisdom teaches many lessons which could be applied in the Christian life. Worldly people say: "Grab fortune by the hair while she is passing by you, otherwise you may miss her forever." Christians, too, must pay attention to something which may decide their future destiny.

Rather than theorize, we go to few scriptural examples, showing some crisis in religious people. We begin by quoting Judges 7:5-7. "So he [Gideon] brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Everyone that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shall thou set by himself; likewise everyone that bowed down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lappeth, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place."

The lesson is clear. It was an incident seemingly insignificant in itself, but which discovered who were the people

fit for victory—the Kingdom. Note also the humiliating comparison: “as a dog lappeth.”

Another instance taken from the book of Esther. After the proclamation of the decree, that the Jews should be destroyed on a certain month and day, Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes. Having received a message from his pupil, the Queen Esther, he informed her of what had happened and entreated her to supplicate the king so that the cruel decree should be abrogated. Queen Esther answered that she could not go into the inner court, under danger of capital punishment, unless she was called, or except the king would hold out the golden sceptre, this being the law. Mordecai did not accept the excuse of the one he loved as if she were his only child; but sent back a hard message:

“Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed.”

The saintly man did not close the message with these gloomy words; but concluded by pointing to a glorious possibility, saying: “And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Nothing else was said. Esther accepted the responsibility, faced the risk, and won the case, procuring deliverance for her people.

Our point is in the last words of Mordecai, “to the kingdom for such a time as this.” Many meanings.

An obscure Jewish girl had become the queen in the most powerful monarchy of the world at that time. Surely there was some design of God who foreknew coming events! Also the words uttered by that saintly man, go beyond the meaning which he gave them. They infer, that the risk was the crucial point in the life of Esther. An enemy was trying to destroy all the Jews; and she would surely perish

in the number. Now was her opportunity to take the situation in hand and risk all for all. Victory would crown her courage; or, if she should die, she would perish a martyr in the endeavor of saving a great people. To remain idle was worse than death. By that effort she would make secure her position of queen in the kingdom. Prophecy is this of critical events which decide the destiny of those who have to be in the New Jerusalem.

Two other incidents: one is in 1 Kings 3:16-28. It is well known, the incident of the two women and the one living child. Each pleaded with Solomon that the living child was her's, and the dead one was the other's. Solomon ordered that the living child should be cut in two and given half to each woman. One of them, cut in her bowels, pleaded with the king to let the child live and give him to her adversary; the other showed satisfaction, approving the decision. The judgment of Solomon is well known: he decided that the one who was ready to accept the blame of negligence, who had caused the death of one of the babies, and had accepted the desolation of being deprived of the child, content that the child should live although in her enemy's hand—she, indeed, was the real mother. This incident occupied only a brief time, but in the realm of the Spirit may prophesy years of sufferings. The real Church is endued with a spirit of motherhood; but she has many enemies in the false church and also in the visible church. Yet, she is ready to take blames and undergo sacrifices and losses, provided that others should not be scandalized or destroyed.

It would be too long to meditate on the noble words of that unhappy prince, Mephibosheth, who was slandered by his servant, Ziba, to whom the king in haste had given all the properties of the prince. When David returned to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth explained that he could not have gone to meet the king because he was lame and had

no one to help him. When the king modified the sentence and said that he, Mephibosheth, and Ziba would divide the properties, the crippled prince who, at that time, was still in mourning, not having dressed his beard nor changed his clothing—that pitiful rag of humanity answered: "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house" (2 Samuel 19:30).

Let the reader answer the question: Who, of the two, is worthy to be in the Kingdom of God: the greedy, astute Ziba, good-looking and smooth-tongue, successful in his enterprises; or that crippled prince? Real justice is not of this world: even great saints at times fail to understand and practice God's justice.

We conclude this chapter with a beautiful portrait. It is also in 2 Samuel 19. The rebellion of Absalom had been crushed; and Absalom had been killed. David was returning to Jerusalem. The first to meet him was Shimei with an apparatus of accompaniment, and he prostrated himself before the king, pleading to be forgiven of the act of having injured and cursed the king in the day of distress. It was easy to detect that the penitence was not genuine, for there was too much of a show and artifice. The words themselves which Shimei uttered, "Behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king," those words, the big following that he took, the appearing in company of another stage comedian, Ziba—all reveal the real value of that feigned penitence. The reader may do well in reconsidering the events of 2 Samuel 16.

Abishai, a faithful servant of David, answered and said: "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" Humanly speaking, David's general was right: justice should have taken its course. But David, by a prophetic insight, rose above the situation. He answered sharp words of reprimand to his own friend: "What

have I to do with you . . . that ye should this day be adversary unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do I not know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him."

Let us not imagine that this generosity was easy to David, or that he was deceived by appearances. No, David read through Shimei. The future charge he gave to Solomon reveals the deep wound in David's heart, and the apprehension of danger of Shimei in the kingdom of the young king, Solomon. No, it was not easy for David to reprimand a faithful and tried servant, Abishai, and compare him to satan, accuser. David was himself remembering and was tempted to take vengeance. But something moved in that great prophetic heart which made him discover in that opportunity a great occasion of a spiritual victory. Note the various questions: each one, tending to fortify himself against the easy temptation of avenging himself. "'Shall there any man be killed this day in Israel?' This day? after such tragic events, mourning the death of my own son, this day that the Lord graces me to see again the city I left in flight, and to adore before the Ark? Having received so much grace, must I think of vengeance? No, let this day remain a day of mercy for me and others, even for a Shimei."

The last question did not come to him as words we read in a book already prearranged. Each question must have been followed by a great pause. While he saw his enemy—false in his penitence, always dangerous—prostrated at his feet and he, David, crucifying his own heart, by sparing Shimei's life, an assurance loomed before him. Toning down his voice, almost in tears, he asked—and the question was not a doubt but an affirmation—"Do not I know that I am this day king over Israel?"

David was king even the day before, and even before that. Since Absalom had been slain, there were no other pretenders. Moreover, he had been destined to the kingdom by God Himself and had been anointed and confirmed long before now. But the words, "king this day," go beyond the limits of space and time, looking distant to another kingdom. Much can be thought, if not said, even in a moment. Between three forces,—renting his big heart, his proper feelings; the suggestion of a great warrior and faithful servant; and the comedy of a hypocrite,—David received a flash of light, that, just in that moment, he was receiving a divine assurance: *that day had he become a king indeed!*

The Church is a kingdom of kings and priests. Jesus is King of kings, and it is clear to understand that these "kings" are not the earthly potentates which have and are passing away. That the King has sub-kings in His court is inferred also by a passage in 2 Samuel 24:23. A generous farmer had offered David the threshing floor, its instruments, and oxen for a burnt sacrifice unto the Lord. David did not accept it without paying the price, and acted nobly. But the Holy Spirit gives a special name to the generous offerer. We read: "All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto a king. And Araunah said unto the king, The Lord thy God accept thee." Araunah was not a king, but the Holy Spirit, for this act, calls him "king."

Indeed, there is a time when some unexpected crisis, costing sacrifices, decides our destiny. Eternal Life, of course, is by Grace; but the Kingdom is entered through crucifixion.

CHAPTER XLII

IN TWO WORLDS

Ephesians 3:15

John 13:1

John 3:13

Colossians 3:2

Philippians 3:20

Let not one expect a logical demonstration of what is written in this book. Spiritual things must be discerned by spiritual minds; moreover, it takes a long time and discipline even before saintly intellects are "entuned" to heavenly realities. It is another realm in which we enter by faith and revelation. God has His own methods which we will understand in proportion as we surrender our mind to that of God's. There is a logic of the Spirit. But to our subject:

In Ephesians 3:15 we read of a family in heaven and on earth. In John 13:1 is the remark that Jesus, "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Such statements make us see a large family: some in heaven, and some on earth. In Colossians 3:2 we read, that we have to set our affection on things above, not on things of the earth. In Philippians 3:20 occurs: "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." The word "conversa-

tion" also means "citizenship." It gives the idea of a man who travels away from home, yet has the center of his interests, not in the various countries, but in his home town where he is registered as a citizen. However, we should not abandon the word "conversation" which gives light to the methods and ways of the stranger in the various territories: he never stops corresponding with people of his own town; his family and other connections are there. A frequent communication keeps him in constant touch with them. In our times we would imagine that a wealthy traveler keeps phoning distant messages to his family and employers. With the discovery of television, he will enjoy, not only the voice, but the presence of his distant relations.

Shall we imagine that our relations with the heavenly family has less privileges? Has not the Spirit more power than the body upon distances? It is true that, while in this body, we are, in a sense, absent from the Lord, but this refers in the sense of bodily absence. We cannot deny that our body is like a weight and a cloud; but this does not exclude that our spirits, becoming more and more possessed by God's Spirit, are in touch with the superior realm.

The best mode of illustrating the charming subject is by appealing to the words of the Lord Himself. In the interview with Nicodemus, Jesus said: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. . . . And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven." The primary meaning of the pronoun "we" refers, of course, to the Deity; but then it extends also to the Church, who, by becoming more and more united to her Head, enters into the *we*. In reading the seventeenth chapter of John, we see the prayer of Jesus that the Church may become one with Him and with the Father, as Father and Son are One. In the above words addressed to Nicodemus, Jesus presents Himself as the Son of Man, for He aims at encouraging man to

become like Him. He affirms that He had ascended to heaven, has come down from heaven, and is in heaven: three conditions.

The ascended (past tense) does not refer to the ascension after the Resurrection; consequently, it must point to special visitations of Him to the heavenly realm. After these visitations, He came—He was coming—down. A continuous ascending, a continuous descending. But while down, He was still in heaven.

Of course, the wise men of this world, or the literalistic Christians will laugh at such statements. Let them laugh. We remember that on a certain occasion some people laughed Jesus to scorn, and at another time even His relations said that He was insane. Our point, based on the words of Jesus, is that He could be in heaven and on earth at the same time. We hear the remark of some theologians: "But He was Christ!" And we answer by these two affirmations, both drawn by the harmony of the scriptures: Jesus, on earth, depended, step by step, on the Grace of the Father; He did not move or act by power in Himself but by what He kept receiving from above. Also it is scriptural that, as Jesus has been in this world, so the Church must be, even in the world. Consequently, in the measure we are in Him—in that measure will we act and move like Him. If He was in the same time in heaven and on earth, the Invisible Church, too, must begin *now* and *here* to move in two worlds.

To confirm this truth, we appeal to another scripture, John 6:60-63. When some were offended, judging the words of Jesus to be hard sayings, He answered: "Doth this offend you? What if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

Of course, it is easy to imagine, that many see in this ascending, Jesus' ascension after the Resurrection. Yet, we

must consider the words, "ye shall see," which refer to a future people; and we must also consider the words, "the spirit quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." By these reflections, we have to conclude that Jesus spoke prophetically of a people who would someday see and experience the spiritual ascension of the Son of Man. The words, "Son of Man" include the future *sons* of the Kingdom. These ascensions of ours are incomplete, for we are still on this earth imprisoned in a body; but spiritual ascensions we cannot deny. This is confirmed indirectly by the word in Hebrews 6:5, "And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come"; and also in two other passages, not mentioning others: Psalm 40 and Hebrews 12. But of this in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE UNIVERSAL ASSEMBLY

Psalm 40:10

Hebrews 12:18-29

We have mentioned in a previous chapter that the names of those who feared God and thought on the Name (Malachi 3) are written in a book in heaven. We also observed that we must not think of books according to those in human libraries: it is something ordered and set. While still on earth, the names were in the sidereal scrolls. God has no need of any recorder, nor do we need documents in heaven as we think of documents according to human laws. The information of the prophets, to the blessed people enrolled in heaven, has a meaning, that the day dawns when some Christians know by inner revelation that they have been admitted to the heavenly kingdom. In a word, that they belong to the great congregation, otherwise called the Universal Assembly and also the New Jerusalem.

In Psalm 40:9-10 we read: "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation . . . I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." This applies

primarily to the earthly ministry of Jesus, but extends also to the Church. While the ministry of the Lord was persecuted and seemed with no fruit—or only little fruit—He was always preaching. Let us not imagine that the fickle crowds which followed and abandoned Him are the great congregation. We must visualize some crowd invisible to human eyes. That it is so, we also infer by Ephesians 3:10, where it is written that the principalities and powers in heavenly places might know by the Church the manifold wisdom of God. These powers are invisible to the natural eye, but are a reality to those who enter, more and more, in the spiritual realm. The Church must arrive *now* and *here* to the condition of seeing and communing with the great congregation. In Ephesians 3:18 we read that, in order to comprehend the four dimensions of breadth and length, depth and height, we must be with all the saints. The scripture runs, "may be able to comprehend with all saints." It is the large family in heaven and on earth. Little by little, each becomes attracted to his family. Many times we almost feel the presence of the saints of the past, or even of some who are still in this earthly life. We can affirm that at times, in moments of great distresses, we felt as if someone had entered our room, or had come near us; we even noticed a change in the atmosphere nearby.

This condition of being enrolled in that book and made part of the great congregation is preceded by many stations. We exhort the reader to return to the meditation of Hebrews 12:18-29. The first information is that we come to a mount which is not touched by a material hand. This place is called Zion, the city of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem. With them is an innumerable company of angels. It is also called "general assembly" and "church of the firstborn." The sacred writer, speaking prophetically, says: "Ye are come unto"; it means those who are: such a coming occurs while still on earth. The teaching about

the invisible congregation was not easy to be accepted. Hence, the warning, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Man resists long to the teachings concerning the Invisible.

Prophetically, it is written that the coming has been also "to the spirits of just men made perfect." Call it—if you please—a relative perfection, as we may infer from Philippians: there is an ultimate perfection which we never gain while in this body; and a relative perfection, according to the light and intentions of the heart (Philippians 3:12, 15). The lesson is that those who travel the stations mentioned in Hebrews 12 will be joined to other spirits. It does not speak of bodies, nor of distances which have no importance in the realm of the Spirit. This condition is ultimately reached when we accept, as godsent, shakings on earth and in heaven, which means that we are ready to give up, not only material impediments, but accumulations of religious theories which cloud our vision. In the past we may even have been blessed somehow; but the time comes that even the "heavens" in us must undergo shakings. Then is the time to accept and receive a kingdom which cannot be moved.

The book of Revelation has by many been explained in a way, that things are placed either in the past or in the future, forgetting the affirmation (chapter 1:19): "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Past, present, and future—each is under the eyes of one writer who must see all, before reaching the final goal. Let us not forget that John with his, "I saw, I heard," typifies the Church.

In chapter nineteen, after the Babylonian confusion had been overthrown,—and we may add, after the shakings on earth and in heaven,—John informs of this experience: "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people [it is the great congregation] in heaven [not necessarily

one place, but heavenly conditions], saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God."

The Apostle was an exile in a barren island. After the various experiences and letters to the churches, he saw that the work had not been in vain, that God has His own people. Only when we reach a certain condition do we see the Real Church, and we begin to pronounce and hear genuine *Alleluias*.

CHAPTER XLIV

SEEING IN THE BEYOND

Amos 3:7	Matthew 18:31
1 Kings 22:20-23	Ephesians 1:10
Daniel 4:17	Isaiah 33:14-17
Ecclesiastes 10:20	Isaiah 49:20-21

We cannot entirely avoid repetitions; they serve to impress, deeper, vital subjects. Among the various ministries in the Church are mentioned "prophets." Very little is given in the New Testament about such a ministry. The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 14:3) writes: "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation, and comfort." This is not defining that ministry, but points to its effects. A little more light we will have by considering Revelation 19:10.

"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [power] of prophecy." It means that the basic preaching of the prophets is the portraying of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving special emphasis to His humanity. If we observe the words of a few, really consecrated Christians, we will see that they are occupied, less and less, with ecclesiasticism and, more and more, with the portraying of Jesus Christ. It is a sad

truth that the majority of religious literature and preachings speak very little of the *person* of Christ. Salvation from sin, of course, is presented; and it should be presented even more; but there is a more important theme to insist upon, and is the studying of the Lamb of God. Let us remember that John the Baptist gave two messages to two different classes of hearers. The first day, he pointed out the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world; the following day the message was brief: "Behold the Lamb of God." In the first occasion he spoke to a crowd; on the second day, only to two disciples. Indeed, only a few are really matured to be in the school where the main topic is, not what Jesus has done for us—important and vital as it is to know,—but it is what He Himself *is*. It is this second preaching which is mainly called "prophetical" in the sense of Revelation 19:10.

A prophet is a rare servant of the Lord. The Invisible Church abounds mostly in this kind of ministry.

We read in Amos 3:7: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets." In our book, "The Son of Man," we have written about the prophets of the Old Testament, illustrating the difference between them and the priests. The prophets seemed, many times, rebels to the temple and the settled customs of the nation. The contrast came by the fact that they had more light, and saw things which others did not see. Read, for instance, how many things did these men perceive and see, while others saw nothing. The Invisible Church is, more and more, endued with such power of communing with the invisible realm and seeing things hidden to others. A few instances:

We do not stop at the many warnings given by the various prophets and at their many seeings: it would be too long a study. We wish to consider 1 Kings 22:20-23.

While hundreds of false prophets were encouraging and flattering the king of Israel to go up against Ramoth-gilead, a solitary man, Micaiah, alone, had seen that the king's doom had been decided in heaven. Micaiah had witnessed a strange council in which the Lord had asked: who would be able to persuade Ahab to go to battle? "And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. . . . I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." The warning was not accepted by the king of Israel, who ordered the fearless man to be put in prison and be fed with bread and water of affliction. But Ahab did not return, as the prophet had announced, for he—Ahab—perished.

Another instance.

The king of Babylon had been terrified by a dream. Daniel interpreted that he, Nebuchadnezzar, would receive a heart of a beast and be under chastisement seven times—seasons of which we do not know the duration. Then, the prophet added: "This matter is by the decree of the watchers; and the demand by the word of the holy ones." Daniel saw a group of saints in heaven interested in the affairs of this earth.

In Isaiah 33:14-17 there is a question: "Who will remain firm in the presence of the fire of God." The answer is given, pointing to a people who are strict in inner justice and who close their eyes and ears to evil. Of this people is written: "He shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him: his waters shall be sure." A people still on earth but living on high and fed in a mysterious way. Changing the pronoun from the third person to the second, the prophet continues: "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."

Many things the Invisible Church will see, to which the majority of Christians remain strangers. She lives at the

same time in this world of matter and in the realm of spirits. She sees that the Lord has a plan, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in Him." We cannot examine at length this mighty promise; we only insist that, to one who lives in the realm of the Spirit, two adverbs become more and more familiar. To the question "where," the answer is **HERE**; to the other demand "when," the reply is **NOW**. To the woman of Samaria the Lord said that the time would come, but added, "now is." Time, for that woman, had come.

To Martha, speaking of a distant resurrection, Jesus answered that He is the Resurrection and the Life. We do not deny a beyond with the many things which must happen and come to pass; however, we know also that there are many mansions. In the realm of the Spirit, things begin *now*. Distances and ages disappear to those who, more and more, are brought to live in the realm above. Those who so live become strangers to their own brethren. Persecution awaits them. There is a reason why James exhorts: "Take my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."

Martyrdom awaits us in the concluding portion of our book.

PART
FIVE

Martyrdom

CHAPTER XLV

MARTYRDOM: PREPARATION

Acts 17:7

Revelation 1:9

Luke 12:32

Matthew 10:28

Revelation 2:10

About four hundred years before the birth of Jesus, a great philosopher, whose writings have been acclaimed as the most approaching of its kind to the Christian ideal, remarked about a perfect state: The future guardians should undergo a special preparation and be ready also to be persecuted. The philosopher compares the guardians to those who live in the light and in freedom, and see things in their due proportions; whereas, the people whom thy must serve live in a cave and see things by a reflexed light. The guardians, in trying to teach, will not be understood, because the vision of the people is distorted. Those who come out of the cave will suffer at first, but, little by little, will gain the right vision of things.

It comes to our memory the incident of the blind man who, after Jesus' touch, began to see men, at first, like walking trees; and, after he had received a second touch and his head had been turned upward, he saw everything clearly.

The Invisible Church must be prepared to suffer. Of course, this truth the reader may consider as applied to all Christians, in general; but he should not forget that to approve an ideal is one thing, and to possess it, making it his own life, is a different proposition. Only those Christians who have been introduced into Kingdom Realm are ready to suffer and persevere to the end.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Colossians, states that there is a "cup of suffering" which is shared with the Elect. John informs that he was a witness of Christ and partaker with others in the sufferings for the Kingdom. The message to the Church of Smyrna clearly implicates that Christians have to suffer, yet they must be fearless. It was Jesus Himself who has forewarned the Apostles about *martyrdom*. In Matthew 10:28 we read: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." And in Luke 12:32, He encouraged them with these words: "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

The preaching of the Kingdom was faithfully carried on in the beginning of the Apostolic era; but when theologians began to speculate on signs, on Jesus' coming, on detailing "where" and "how" this Kingdom should be, and much more, Christians began to lose the real import of the Kingdom's message. Since then we see churches occupied more of signs than of the invisible guidance; more of anti-christ than of Christ; many theories but portraying little of the King, the Lamb of God who by coming in us inaugurates His Kingdom. Let us leave the future in His mighty and sure hands, and let us be concerned about the King and the Kingdom we must receive.

We remember one of the main topics of the Sermon on the Mount in these words: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Do we understand the Lord's righteousness? His way of measuring people and

events? As the Church seeks this Kingdom and cherishes, more and more, a righteousness in spirit, she will become a stranger even to her own brethren, as Jesus was.

In that universal Psalm, the second, God the Father faces man's upheavals with the triumphant affirmation: "Yet have I set [read well that "set"] my King upon my holy hill of Zion." It is not a theory but the entrance of a Person who assumes the government of our lives, so that we no longer, but He rules us. Then the words of Isaiah 9:6 become a reality and we understand what is the real meaning, that a child is born, a son is given, and the government is upon his shoulders. Instead of making investigations on details which may be—and I believe are—fanciful, we should, more and more, make room for the King and His Kingdom.

In that glorious passage so often quoted about the travelling of the Church from the visible to the invisible (Hebrews 12:18-29), there is a warning that people—viz., which is the visible church, may not despise the speaker, for God will shake earth and heaven—even our cherished theological notions and blessings. There is also an invitation that we must receive the Kingdom. The receiving is more than merely knowing about it, or being elated by emotions. It is the entrance of the King and His court in our inner sanctuary, which like the tent, prophesied by Isaiah, had to be more and more enlarged: we, each one of us, become more and more a vast temple. In it must move the princely Leader and His retinue. Please read with anointed eyes the prophecy of Ezekiel (chapter 40-47), concerning the temple which enlarges in proportion that it was measured, and where only the Prince and His priests moved, and where only perfect sacrifices were offered.

Receiving the Kingdom is the last invitation to the Church after she has traveled from the visible to the invisible. Moreover, the Kingdom cannot be shaken. We

must be prepared to see our God and accept Him as "a consuming fire." Yes, we know that perfection, absolute perfection, is not of this life; but we must cherish a perfect ideal and stretch towards it, leaning on God's Grace; and then we will live between a state of imperfection—relating to the ultimate beyond—and a condition of perfection in proportion to our grace and light.

Kingdom-people are appointed unto death. This word has large meanings. Materially, death occurs when the soul forsakes the body; but, spiritually speaking, death works in us whenever we sacrifice the visible to the invisible. In that measure, we become more and more separated from earthly things and introduced to the heavenly realities.

The scripture in speaking of the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob uses these words: "And [Abraham] was gathered to his people. And [Isaac] was gathered unto his people." (In the case of Isaac, Rotherham has, instead of the word "gathered," the word "added.") "And [Jacob] was gathered unto his people." (Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 49:33).

How often we sigh for a congenial company which we may call "our home"! Only by death, when we die to ourselves,—we mean, to earthly plans,—we enter, while still in our bodies, associations which are godgiven. The things of the beyond we begin to taste and enjoy here. Even in this life each saint is, little by little, introduced and joined, "bone to bone" to his own people. But our subject is Preparation to Martyrdom.

"Witness" and "martyr" are the same in the original tongue: every witness is a martyr, and vice-versa. When God's plan in us is fulfilled, then, the final stroke of martyrdom arrives, although we have been already martyred, inch by inch, by a daily death. Prepared we must face the end: the details, times, and circumstances the Father has kept in His proper hand.

CHAPTER XLVI

MARTYRDOM: VITUPERATION—BEHEADING

Esther 3:8

Revelation 11; 20:4

Words of wicked man are often unconscious prophecies. The minister Haman, incensed by the dignified demeanor of a saint, Mordecai, planned the destruction of all the Jews in the kingdom of Persia by speaking to the king: "There is a certain people, scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." Truth and lies were mixed in the report, for people who fear God do respect the laws of the countries when they do not interfere with a higher law. But in many things, God's people are diverse from others; consequently, they are observed, at first, and, later, hated and persecuted. It is true that many observers are, little by little, admiring the qualities of the strangers, and someday they will imitate and follow; but the majority are opposed and are, more and more, embittered.

The Invisible Church cannot be located in groups. If this would happen, that they would open assemblies and

inscribe on the door, "The Invisible Church," they would prove that they were no longer invisible, but have formed a sect. This has happened in many religious movements, where people have vaunted of official, flattering titles. The Invisible Church is composed of individuals scattered abroad, here and there, who remain where they are, until God's finger points to them a movement. In a sensible minority, they act in the various religious confessions as a "salt" and "light." Without these few, here and there, the sects would compromise entirely, and we do not know where they would terminate. The few act as a restraining force. Consequently, we should never torment honest people by urging them: "Come here; go there," etc.

The Lord knows how to use and direct His Elect. They cannot remain hidden: salt savors the viands; light shines in the darkness. They, the few, like a city on a hill, cannot remain hidden; but have to suffer and die. The Lord has prepared them for such a terminal. Their end must be in Jerusalem, the earthly city.

Although not all individuals are prophets, they, as a body, are a "prophet"; and as such they—he—must perish in Jerusalem. Jerusalem kills the prophets and stones them that are sent unto her. There are many ways of killing and stoning. But to proceed:

This book is already more voluminous than we first intended. For this reason we touch, in a suggesting way, never presuming to exhaust vast themes.

Three men are mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Revelation, and these three are *one*; moreover they are representative of various classes of servants. John is commanded to "rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." The court without, he was not to measure. It is a close work of inspection, to be made by a mature saint in the bosom of Christianity.

What kind of temple had they? genuine adoration or some form of man's ritual? Did they really have the "altar," Christ, in their midst? how did they love and obey Him? What was the character of the worshippers?

John had to measure and measure. After this appeared two strange individuals, witnesses, ordered to prophesy for a certain length of time, clothed in sackcloth. Since flesh—visible—profiteth nothing, the word signifies that they were men of contrite spirits and broken hearts, in mourning and penitence. These are "olive trees" and "candlesticks," filled with the Holy Ghost: they are the real Church. Their preaching is like *fire*, before which enemies cannot stand. Power has been given to them. During the twelve hours—the appointed time of their ministry—no one can hurt or stop them. There is indeed a time when a servant of God is irresistible and goes through water and fire. No one could stop Jesus before His end arrived; no one can cripple the usefulness of the members of the Invisible Church, till their appointed time.

When these two will have finished their testimony, the "beast that ascended out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." How much could be said on the words "beast," "pit"! What a mass-persecution and, from how deep, evil had accumulated! The "beast" will not be satisfied with killing, but will expose the dead bodies in the street of the great city which is called by the names of Sodom and Egypt, and where the Lord has been crucified. All evil, nested in secret in the earthly Jerusalem, reaches its apex in front of the highest in the Christian ministry. In fact, the higher the honest preacher soars, the deeper is stirred the hell of hatred. The streets witness the exposure of dead bodies. Corruption and putrefaction are at hand. With the advance stage of civilization, the informations fly from the streets, newspapers of

the city of all the world. Gifts are exchanged. Progress has already abolished distances and much can be informed and transported in a brief space of time throughout the whole world. A carnival of rejoicing over the dead bodies of the two great saints. Yes, we do not deny that something can be either spied or invented about them and mentioned with this exclamation:

"Ah, finally we got them! They made us tremble. Look at them now! what fine carcasses."

Oh reader! rejoice not at the misfortunes of others, nor publish the news in the land of the Philistines when some hero has fallen. Men, even saintly men, are not perfect. The message of the two witnesses was fearless and uncompromising. Now they have gone; their bodies are exposed to ridicule and malediction.

But—there is a *but*.

God interfered: He raised them and sent a terrible earthquake which brought havoc among the sneerers and persecutors. After that, "the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament." Death, exposure, raising by God's mercy—all led to a new opening of the spiritual realm. Let us hasten to the last point.

Revelation 20:4.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

We leave computation of time to the Lord. Just a little suggestion: the infinite message given to finite minds is at times clothed in a finite language. The word "thousand" means much more than ten centuries and is used

often in an indeterminate sense: kingdom of thousand after thousand years. We cannot extend on this topic: our subject is *Martyrdom*.

Only martyrs are enabled to become fellow-judges of the great Judge and Lawgiver. They are those who have in their own life witnessed—manifested—Jesus, and have suffered for the word of God, not for the letter, but the WORD. It is not out of place here to remind that there is the incarnate, the revealed, and the written word; and that the Lord—Good Shepherd—speaks continually, and only the sheep hear His voice. Let no one misinterpret the word of God, but let him keep in mind that it is always the breath that comes from the mouth of the Living God. The center of the word is Christ; the one who reads and puts this word before us is the Holy Spirit. Let us continue:

These witnesses had been beheaded. In the days of St. John and always there have been various modes of death, and also a beheading reserved for those who were not burned, stoned, drowned, or crucified. If only beheaded people were among the martyrs, others who had terminated by a different mode of death would not be included. What is, then, this beheading?

We are too much in a world of coarse matter, too abstract from materialization of great ideals. For a long time we have wept at the material passion of Jesus, but now we begin to understand that His Spirit's and Soul's sufferings were much keener. Applying this truth to the saints we see that their dying at one blow from the executioners is not the gravest death. There is a finishing, so to say, killed by "pin-points," a slow death by fire; a long life agony of anguish that no man can describe or imagine.

The head, the seat of thinking, is involved in everything in life. On coming to Christ, we have been commanded to renounce self. During the training in His school,

we have to give up, surrender our thoughts and imaginations, and possess the mind of the Master. What a sight to see a group of people sitting as judges, having no heads—their own heads! Their *head* is Christ. It is not out of place here to remember that John the Baptist was beheaded: the noble head was presented to the adulteress; the mutilated body was granted to the disciples for a burial.

"Head" also is the seat where man shows personality and human dignity. How much there is on the information that beheaded saints, only they, sit with Christ in judgment!

Time to close our book, long but brief.

Only after all this has occurred—and it means much more than historical or future events—only after the Invisible Church has gone through all that is she in a capacity to see, "a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away." And there is no more sea—agitations, unsettlements, unrest. Only then, can she see the New Jerusalem and have the description of it. Then, she will be shown "a pure river of water of life, clear as a crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb."

Only then shall Christ's servants finally serve Christ. For the past, it has been a mixed service. And only then can she seal in herself that the things of God—those alone are really the truth. Then, and not before, will she hear the promise of the Bridegroom: "Surely I come quickly," rapidly when I come; and she will reply, like sealing a deed, a hearty Amen, an answer from her land of exile: "Even so, come Lord Jesus"—Master and Lover.

The Invisible Church will not stop and remain in that ecstatic posture, with her face upward and with her speech to the Lord, Lover; but will remember that the best gratitude to God is shown by loving and serving man for His sake. Consequently, turning her face downward to needy humanity, she will broadcast the encouraging message to call those

who want to listen: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

People do not answer, do not close; but the Invisible Church seals for them the great deal and, as representing present and future members of the Body of Christ, she herself concludes:

AMEN.

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